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ALLERTON TOWERS.

A Novel.

By ANNIE THOMAS

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AUTHOR OF "DENIS DONNE," "PLAYED OUT," "EYRE OF BLENDON," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ALLERTON TOWERS.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. TEMPLETON BEGINS TO BUILD.

T is not an encouraging morning. A cold, raw fog is hanging over Allerton Towers. The atmosphere is so heavy that the cathedral and church bells, which have been ringing at intervals since early morn, sound muffled and mournful, and any thing but jocund as they are intended to be. It is one of those depressing days on which water seems to be wetter than usual, and beds of late-flowering German-asters, and chrysanthemums, which have been masses of bright bloom but a few hours previously, assume the appearance of unkempt collections of dank vegetation. Unquestionably, it is not an encouraging morning, and the poor

Bishop has never stood in such sore need of encouragement before in his life.

For the happy day which is to see Mrs. Heatherley transformed into Mrs. Templeton, has dawned at last, and the Bishop is a prey to the uncomfortable sensations which are apt to assail a person who is going to take a leap in the dark.

Never before has his coffee tasted so bitter, or his toast so chokingly dry, as on his marriage morn. With all his power of wishing, he wishes now that he had insisted on taking Mrs. Heatherley for better and worse in the total obscurity of one of the East-end of London churches. But it is too late now to change the programme, and he knows that he must go to his doom in his own cathedral, with the disapproving eyes of all the clergy in the diocese bent upon him.

The poor Bishop! He is weak—very weak, but not at all wicked; and the only feeling that ought to be evoked by the spectacle he offers of himself this morning, is one of profound pity. He is ready, dressed

beautifully and elaborately, as usual, but to-day it seems as if his legs were shrinking away from his stockings, and as if he were growing altogether a smaller and slighter Bishop than he has been heretofore.

There has been little or no peace in the Palace since early dawn this day. In the first place, Miss Templeton, who has been antagonistic to her father's matrimonial scheme all along, has now put this crowning affront upon him of refusing to go to the cathedral and witness his nuptials; not only this, but she has dealt him a cruel blow in these last helpless moments. She has read to him portions of a letter which she has received this morning, which gives pretty confirmatory evidence as to Mrs. Heatherley's extravagance and impecuniosity, her debts and difficulties. That fair and lively lady has, it appears, sold all the property which she can sell, and mortgaged the remainder, and has managed to come to the end of her resources simultaneously with her marriage with the Bishop.

“I warned you, and you would not take my warning, papa; and now, unless you rouse yourself and take proper action without delay, you will be saddled with that extravagant pauper and her daughter for the rest of your life.”

“I should bring a bitter scandal on my cloth and calling, if I allowed considerations of a sordid nature to intervene between me and the fulfilment of a solemn promise,” the Bishop says, quailing under his daughter’s condemning glance, but striving valiantly the while to deport himself as becomes a man and a bishop.

“You will bring a more bitter scandal upon your cloth and calling, if you let that little fox into your home as its mistress; do rouse yourself, papa; consult some of your friends, if you won’t be guided by me; put off the marriage to-day, and make inquiries into her affairs; insist upon her telling you how she is really situated, and if she refuses to do that, the way will be made easy for you to break off your engagement.”

“Fanny, you talk my head off my shoulders; the little strength I have must soon give way, if I am agitated and shattered in this way,” the Bishop says, appealingly, but he shows no sign of obeying her mandate, and breaking off his marriage with the widow.

The hour is approaching rapidly, and still Miss Templeton excludes familiar friends from her father’s library, while she alternately exhorts and upbraids him. But it is beyond her strength to make a bishop commit a breach of promise of marriage. And so, in due time, with much fear and trembling, and perhaps, as much to his own amazement as to that of any of the shocked and scandalised faithful, the Bishop of Allerton Towers stands at the altar and takes a woman in holy matrimony for the second time in his life.

It is remarked by all the assembled multitude, who can catch a glimpse of her fair, rosily-tinted face, that the bride looks as young as her daughter, robed in pearly-

gray satin, over which clouds of Honiton lace billow. The bride looks as innocent and interesting as if her head were not aching with anxiety, and her heart with dread.

Whereas Ethel seems to have lost the bonnieness and roundness of youth in the course of the last few hours, and altogether strikes Lily Somerset, who is one of the congregation assembled to witness the event, as being anything but the bright beauty she is proclaimed to be by public opinion.

Indeed, the blow which the Bishop has received this morning is as nothing compared with the one that has fallen on Ethel's head.

It has gone against the girl's delicate sense of the fitness of things to hold much converse with her mother on the subject of the latter's marriage. But on the wedding morning Ethel has crushed out this spirit of repugnance, and, dismissing the maid, has insisted on being alone with her mother, dressing the bride with her own loving, dainty hands, and

talking as only a daughter can talk to a ~~has~~ mother.

Suddenly, the slim, graceful little figure in gray satin sinks in a heap on the floor at Ethel's feet, and the sweet, tender tints of the face that grows haggard in a moment are washed off by a flood of miserable tears.

"Oh, Ethel, my child! forgive me! forgive me!"

"Mother! mother! you frighten me, my darling," the girl cries, rapturously, lifting the kneeling figure up in her strong young arms.

"I am very, very unhappy. I have been very weak, and wickedly extravagant," the bride moans. "All our money is gone, dear. I am no business woman, and, of course, people have robbed me and cheated me; I am only marrying to secure a home for you, and now, when I find it is too late, I find it will be a wretched home for you when my poverty becomes known. Oh! Ethel, my child! it rests with *you* to lift

this load of woe from off my shoulders. It rests with you to see me honoured, and wealthy, and happy. It rests with you to save my reason and my life, for I verily believe that both will go if this pressure of anxiety be not removed," she continues, wildly.

"Mother!—and I who'd do anything, everything for you, can do nothing," Ethel mutters, between her frightened sobs.

"Yes, you can, if you will, dearest," Mrs. Heatherley cries, eagerly. "See, dear. I would not tell you before, I—I thought you should hear of the great honour which a most estimable man has done you on this day, which is fraught with so much that is deeply interesting to me. The Marquis of Monkstown has asked me to entreat my child to become his wife! My Ethel, you will not say 'no,' when I tell you that if you will marry him he will settle such an income on me as will put me above suspicion and reproach; as will enable me to look every one fairly in the face, knowing that I

owe no man aught, and that I have not impoverished my child! Ethel! are you listening? Do you hear me?"

"Yes! I hear you," Ethel says, putting her hand up to her bewildered head; "but you can't mean it, mother? I can't understand you; I must be going mad, I think."

She pauses and shudders, for all the bells in the town break out into peals that fall horribly upon her ears. The signal has evidently gone forth from the Palace that the bridegroom is about to start to be made a happy man.

"Do you hear them? Do you hear them?" Mrs. Heatherley cries, lifting her hands up imploringly. "Ethel! I have only a minute or two left to decide upon a course. I *dare* not marry the Bishop unless you will help me; your promise to do as I ask you will send me out of the house a happy woman; your refusal to give it to me will compel me to bring scandal and confusion on myself, by even now, at the last moment, breaking off my marriage!"

"Oh, mother! *do* break it off," Ethel pants; but Mrs. Heatherley proceeds to draw on her long, silver-gray gloves, and says, in response—

"That would be a too utterly ridiculous course for a woman of my age, with a grown-up daughter, to pursue. If *you* are quite regardless of my happiness and good name, I must take the greatest care of both myself." Then she lapses from dignified severity to tenderness, and says, "Dearest child! what am I saying? My fate is in your hands; will you condemn your mother to misery and disgrace, Ethel?"

"Mother, darling! Walter will be a son to you if you let him," Ethel says, blushing with pretty confidence in Walter's love and honour, though she has not heard from him for so long a time.

"I would rather *starve* than be dependent on Mr. Gifford," Mrs. Heatherley cries. Then the bells clang in a manner that indicates that the Bishop has reached the cathedral,

and the bride-elect puts the screw on her child for the last time.

“I will not *live* to face the scandal there will be if I break-off my marriage-contract now at the last moment; and I will not be married with this heavy burden upon me. Ethel, you condemn me to death and dishonour; may you be able to forgive yourself; may you, at least, be happy, my child.”

“Oh! mother! let it be as you will,” poor Ethel sobs. A horrible feeling of faintness is creeping over the girl; her heart throbs in a way that threatens to choke her; her brain reels; for a few moments she is scarcely conscious of what she is saying, or of what she is being admonished to do. She only knows that it is in her power to make her mother safe and happy, by assenting to something that will be painful to herself only! What matter! Better for her to suffer pain, misery, anything, rather than her mother should be humiliated! Better that she should do—do what? Well *anything* her mother wishes her

to do! So she gasps out "Mother, let it be as you will," and before she has time to realise that at last she, who loves him so, is false to Walter, her mother has written and sent off a brief note to the Marquis of Monkstown, telling him that Ethel accepts the offer he has done her the honour to make.

The girl feels as if she were in a dream presently when she finds herself standing near to her mother in the cathedral aisle. The wedding-party is a small one, and is not graced by the presence of the Bishop's daughter, but the Bishop's new wife cares very little for that mark of disrespect from Fanny.

"Before I have been a week in the Palace she shall be sorry that she has not made me welcome to it," the bride tells herself, presently, as she takes her husband's trembling arm, and leads him triumphantly down the length of the cathedral, through the great assemblage which has gathered itself together to witness her

crowning success. She feels almost royal as she smiles and bows, and goes through the recognised forms of acknowledgment of the salutations and homage that is being offered to her. She looks what she is—a proud and happy, and thoroughly well-satisfied woman; for is she not a bishop's wife, and is not her daughter to be a marchioness?

No thought of Ethel's bitter sacrifice, no pity for Ethel's aching heart and broken hopes, mars the pleasure and the pride of the woman who feels that she is entering upon the sovereignty of Allerton Towers this day, and who is making up her mind that woe shall betide all those socially who have ever failed to admit her supremacy in the past.

The bridal-party go back to a beautifully-ordered breakfast at the cottage, and immediately after it, the Bishop (who is feeling less and less every minute, and who will rapidly dwindle into absolute nothingness if he does not arrest the rapid decay of

his powers of self-assertion) and his bride start for Jersey, and Ethel, as has been previously arranged, prepares to go back for a week or two with Lady St. Just.

"Lord Monkstown will probably write and tell you of it himself, as soon as he knows he is justified in doing so, but I am sure he will forgive me for being beforehand with him in telling you of the great joy and satisfaction I feel in his engagement to Ethel," Mrs. Templeton says to Lady St. Just, at the moment of leave-taking.

"Indeed! Then I've no satisfaction in hearing it," Lady St. Just snaps. No wonder your daughter looks like a feverish ghost to-day, Mrs. Templeton; it's a wicked work, and I'm glad I've had no hand in it."

"You will not advise Ethel against it?" Mrs. Templeton murmurs, in alarm; "you will do such harm if you do; dear old friend, you will ruin me if you influence Ethel against the marriage!"

“He shall not come to my house to court a girl who might be his granddaughter,” Lady St. Just says, angrily. “Pah! the thought of it turns me sick! With his son in love with her too! How have you bent the child to your wicked will?”

“How can you speak to me so on my wedding-day, knowing as you do how I value your friendship and good opinion?” the bride says, plaintively. “Is there a mother in England who would not do as I have done—urged Ethel to make a brilliant marriage, and a good man happy?”

“And a better man miserable; the son is worth a thousand of the father. You don’t know what mischief may come of it; a great deal of Ethel’s goodness must go before she can marry Monkstown; and when a girl’s goodness goes other things follow!”

“At any rate, leave Ethel unbiassed,” Mrs. Templeton now whispers, earnestly; and then she takes her Bishop away to

give him a fortnight's training before he begins life under her auspices, at Allerton Towers.

"I won't attempt to bias you, because I promised your mother I wouldn't; but if that man comes after you while you're in my house, I'll show him the door myself!" Lady St. Just says to Ethel, as they are driving home.

"Then I should like to stay with you for ever," Ethel says, heartily.

"My dear child, if that's your feeling, why have you been such a weak little fool as to let your mother manage you into making a promise?—not much harm done though, after all. Lord Monkstown is a gentleman, and when he knows your heart is against the business, he'll release you blamelessly, and give you up to his son."

"I don't want to be given up to his son," Ethel mutters.

"You're surely not hankering after that doctor still?" Lady St. Just asks.

"I'm—thinking of him still; I don't know

that I'm hankering after him, as you call it, but I'm always thinking of him, and always wishing to see him."

"I consider such an admission audacious under the circumstances," Lady St. Just says, irritably. With Kenmare in the field it does seem too ignominiously-absurd an infatuation on the part of her favourite, Ethel, to prefer a poor country practitioner."

"The circumstances are, that when I saw him last I was engaged to be his wife, and I have heard nothing from him since to lead me to suppose that those circumstances are altered," Ethel says, quietly; but, for all the quietness with which she speaks, there is an expression of resolution and firmness about her that makes Lady St. Just understand that it must be a weighty motive indeed which has made Ethel Heatherley seem false, even for an hour, to such a love as this.

"And that motive is connected in some way with her mother! What can that tricky little dame have been risking that her daughter

should have to rescue her at such a price as this?" Lady St. Just thinks, reflectively, as she leans back in the carriage, and watches the shadows come and go on Ethel's bonnie face. Presently Lady St. Just says, as if she were opening up a new subject altogether that had no connection whatever with the one they had been discussing—

"Have you ever been to see our tenants at the Uplands, Ethel?"

"I have never even heard of them."

"Oh! I thought every one in Allerton Towers knew the most picturesque farmhouse on its borders; it used to be one of the chief residences of the St. Justs, but since my husband's grandfather died none of the family have lived there. I'll take you over to see it one day while you're with me."

"Thank you," Ethel says, carelessly.

"We often go there for picnics in the summer, when I have young people with me," Lady St. Just goes on; "if they are without lodgers when we go, we lunch in an oak par-

lour; at any rate, whether they have or not they're always willing to show one's friends over the house."

"They're not gentlemen-farmers, as they take lodgers, I suppose?" Ethel asks, with profound indifference.

"No; homely, good sort of unpretentious people, with an old-world air about them that is quite refreshing in these pretentious modern days," Lady St. Just tells her; and Ethel has no idea that she is being lured into the path that will lead to a meeting with her unknown rival, Lily Somerset.

As a rule, Lady St. Just has herself kept tolerably well-informed as to most things that go on in the houses of all such of her husband's tenantry as are within her reach.

The rumour of Miss Somerset's beauty, and Miss Somerset's intimacy with Mr. Gifford as well as with his sister, reached her long ago; but she has not been able to turn it to account yet. Now, however, the time seems ripe for using such knowledge as she has

gained, towards the practical and worldly-wise end of creating such jealous disgust in Ethel's mind as will serve to detach her from her fidelity to her "poor, professional lover." "And he, being a man, will soon console himself," the old lady thinks; "or, if he does not, that won't distress me, if Ethel will only let herself love Kenmare."

Two days after this, Ethel receives the first letter from Lord Monkstown, and the terms of it seems to bind the chains her mother has forged for her more closely about her.

"By consenting, as you have so sweetly done, to be my wife," he writes, "you have not only secured my happiness, but you have brought peace and joy, to which she tells me she has long been a stranger, to your mother's heart. With Lady St. Just's permission. I shall see you in the course of a few days, as I intend to take up my abode for a time at one of the hotels in Allerton Towers. Kenmare would send his best wishes, I am sure, but he has just jogged off in the pony-trap,

with his cousin Caroline, in true Darby-and-Joan style."

"It's not his fault," Ethel argues with herself, as she feels her repugnance to the prospect of receiving Lord Monkstown deepening into loathing, "it's not his fault that I shudder at the thought of him!—it's not his fault that every atom of me tingles with love at the thought of Walter! Poor old man! Mother has deceived him, and deceived me, but she is *mother* still, and I can't do anything that may hurt her; but when he comes I'll tell Lord Monkstown all the truth! And then I'll tell him that if he still will have it so, mother's peace and joy shall be secured—at the cost of my own; but Walter shall know it from me."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Templeton has heard from Lord Monkstown also, and his letter to her contains the fulfilment of that pledge which has made her his warm ally with Ethel. There will be no more depressing monetary considerations to trouble the Bishop's wife, now. All sordid terrors are dispersed by

her future, noble son-in-law's magnificence; and the successful little lady feels it to be within her power now to bloom forth the brightest, most brilliant matron in Allerton Towers.

"Before Ethel's marriage I shall refurnish our reception rooms," she says to the Bishop. "And while we are about it we will have a conservatory run up, to open from the end of the drawing room."

"I dislike having anything to do with bricks and mortar, and I've always said that I would never build on a property that is not my own,"—the Bishop objects. But Mrs. Templeton promptly puts some plans before him, and finally makes him choose the one she likes best.

When she has done this, she writes to Ethel—riveting her daughter's chains still more firmly :

"My own Darling—Would that I could embrace you, my precious little deliverer. I have to-day received the first half-yearly instalment of my income, and have begun to

spend it with the happy feeling that I owe it to my child! A considerable portion of it will go in fittingly decorating my new home for my dear daughter's wedding, which the Bishop and I intend to have celebrated in a way that shall quite befit the high rank you will attain. I am confident from several hints the Bishop let fall—the poor, dear man is like a sieve—that Miss Fanny did her mean little all to make him believe that I was a pauper, and to induce him to break off the marriage. I shall remember these efforts of her's when I return to Allerton Towers! My nature is too open for me to harbour such a feeling as revenge; but, for her own sake, Fanny must be taught that she may not seek to undermine the heart-happiness of others out of mere idle spite."

"Mother makes me feel that it is my duty to be false and wretched," is Ethel's comment on this letter. "Will Walter ever help me, I wonder?—or has he taken me at my silly word? But till I've seen him I'll not write either to mother or Lord

Monkstown; what they do and say is beyond my control, but I'll do nothing myself, nothing—nothing.”

So Lord Monkstown has to console himself for the unflattering, chilly silence, with which his warmth is met by Ethel, by reading reams of rapture which are written to him by her mother.



CHAPTER II.

HER LADYSHIP'S TRUMP CARD.

THROUGH the exercise of some subtlety, Lady St. Just has made herself sufficiently well-acquainted with the routine of daily life as practised by the lady-lodgers at the Uplands Farm, to feel tolerably sure of finding them at home on the morning when she takes Ethel over to have her heart made—what?

Glad, by a sight of the picturesque beauty of the place, nominally, but sorrowfully sad in reality, by hints of Walter Gifford's inconstancy.

Her own maid has been the means of gaining the requisite information for Lady St. Just. Wickham is one of those "extremely superior persons," who, by means of the display of condescending interest in

the affairs of the undesigning, worm out of these latter the dearest secrets of their lives.

This speciality of Wickham's is of service in this case. With the avowed object of ascertaining the price of the excellent butter and poultry at the farm, Wickham calls on Mrs. Mellon, the mistress of it. The price ascertained, Wickham proceeds to give an order which is unusually large, even for Lady St. Just. This order opens Mrs. Mellon's heart wide to the envoy, whom she forthwith carries into her own cosy parlour, and regales with cake that is black with fruit, and spices, and richness, and wine that is correspondingly fruity, and heavy with youth instead of age.

Under the influence of these creature-comforts, Wickham, who has been carefully instructed by her mistress, pretends to grow confidential; and, after extorting a promise of strict secrecy from Mrs. Mellon, the waiting-woman says—

“Well! there'll soon be something to

talk about in Allerton Towers that will put a stop to the gossip about the Bishop's marriage; you shall have three guesses, and I doubt your coming near the truth with one of them."

Mrs. Mellon answers to the challenge promptly, and hazards three guesses at truth, each one of which is of a depreciatory nature to some one of their mutual acquaintances.

"Not near the right one, as I said; but you shall have one more, with the help of a hint from me—it's a wedding?"

"Why! don't *tell* that it's the Bishop's daughter at last!"

"No, indeed; no such luck for her," Wickham says, scornfully. Ever since the ingenuous woman has heard that Miss Heatherley is to be a marchioness, the Bishop's daughter has sunk down to a level of comparative obscurity in her estimation while Ethel, on the contrary, has risen to an altitude that seems a royal height to Wickham.

“Then I give it up—unless you mean our young lady here and Mr. Gifford?” Mrs. Mellon says.

“Oh, that’s settled, is it?” Wickham says, carelessly. “No, they’re not of account enough to make a talk in society; the marriage I mean is a very different thing; and everybody who’s anybody will be interested about it; it’s Miss Heatherley that’s to be married, and the gentleman she is going to marry is a nobleman of great wealth and great rank too—the Marquis of Monkstown.”

Now, in saying this, Wickham is exceeding her instructions. It is no part of Lady St. Just’s plan that this ill-starred engagement of Ethel’s to the father should get noised abroad. All her ladyship’s efforts are made in the son’s interests. But Wickham is proud of being able to impart such thrilling information, and does it without heed to the consequences.

“What! not the Miss Heatherley that Mr. Gifford courted at one time?”

"I don't know anything about Mr. Gifford," Wickham says, in the tones, as nearly as she can copy them, in which she has heard her mistress let down an ignored acquaintance. "The young lady I mean is a great pet of her ladyship's—the Bishop's step-daughter. I shouldn't think *she* could ever have thought of Mr. Gifford."

"But I did hear something like it," Mrs. Mellon says, undauntedly, feeling it hard that her information should be so slightly treated—after the cake and wine, too. "Folks were saying it was a settled thing, and going to be a match, why! only just before Miss Gifford and Miss Somerset came here to lodge; then I suppose he liked Miss Somerset better, for I heard no more talk of Miss Heatherley."

"More likely that Miss Heatherley gave him up, than that he gave her up." Wickham feels a strong personal interest in Miss Heatherley's dignity, hoping that when the latter becomes marchioness, she (Wickham)

may take service a step higher than she is already, in the peerage.

“Well, I can’t say, no more can you, which gave the other up; but I’ve my own reasons for thinking ’twas broken off by the Giffords; Miss Gifford was just like one mad when she found her brother had ‘entangled himself,’ as she called it, with Miss Heatherley, and she told me with her own lips, that to see her brother and Miss Somerset married was the dearest wish of her heart.”

“And little enough Miss Heatherley will care whether that wish is gratified or not. Lor! Mrs. Mellon! why, she’ll be going to Court, and visiting with the royal family, very likely, besides the highest nobility; *she’ll* give no thought to a country-doctor, or who he marries or don’t marry.”

“I hope there is love as well as grandeur,” Mrs. Mellon says, simply. At which remark, Wickham, whose wide experience among the upper ten has enlarged her mind considerably, laughs pleasantly, and observes that “that

part of the matter needn't trouble any one."

Naturally this conversation is repeated by Mrs. Mellon to her lady-lodgers as soon as her visitor goes. Edited by the worthy woman who wishes to display loyalty and partisanship towards Mr. Gifford, it conveys to the minds of her hearers an impression of frivolity, falseness, and heartlessness on the part of Ethel, which sinks deeply into the sister's heart, and makes her rejoice with perfectly disinterested and well-meant joy, that her brother has been saved from the machinations of such an one as this. It sinks deeply into Lily Somerset's heart, too, but she does not verbally express what deductions she draws from it. Nor can Miss Gifford read in Lily's face whether she is glad or sorry.

On the whole, Wickham feels that she has every reason to be satisfied with the result of her mission of investigation. She has found out that the young doctor, of whom her ladyship is wont to speak disparagingly in

moments of confidence with her Abigail, is not only detrimental, but fickle! Wickham, according to her own showing, has had little or no personal experience of the way in which the tender passion is apt to make a woman act under certain circumstances. But she tells herself now, with some vehemence, as she walks home after her chat with Mrs. Mellon, that "if any fellow dared to make love to her, and then pick up with any one else, she would take the first lord that came by and asked her."

"And rightly Miss Heatherley will act in letting such rubbish go, and making a lady of herself," Wickham finally decides in her own mind; and then she is pricked in her conscience by the reflection that she has gone over the border in telling Mrs. Mellon about the engagement of the Marquis of Monkstoun and Miss Heatherley.

"But getting it mentioned, settles it!" the astute Wickham says to herself, in the same spirit which induces those concerned, very often to publish an engagement in the fashion-

able papers before the offer has been made. "Getting it mentioned, settles it; and a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, say I. Her ladyship has set her mind on Lord Kenmare for Miss Ethel, but, Lor! if Miss Ethel's wise she'll make herself happy with the old man, and be a marchioness at once."

Nevertheless, wise as Wickham feels herself to be in her generation, in thus having made a "settling" mention of the projected match, she abstains from alluding to the fact of having done so, in the course of the narrative which she presently unfolds to her mistress.

Wickham's report of her mission is sufficiently encouraging to confirm Lady St. Just in her intention of taking Ethel to The Uplands to be cured of her infatuation for the country-doctor, by the sight of the country-doctor's present enslaver. Accordingly, the day after Wickham's visit, Mrs Mellon is shaken to the centre of her being, by the sight of her ladyship's own landau drawing

up at the Uplands entrance. For though visits from her ladyship are not of rare occurrence, they always seemed to take Mrs. Mellon unawares, robbing her of her composure and her breath, and bringing vividly before her mental vision, in a flash that makes her feel as if she were struck by lightning, all the weak places in the arrangements and management of the farm of which she is the mistress.

But to-day reassuring smiles play upon Lady St. Just's face, and Mrs. Mellon has only time to remember that one of the panes in the dairy window is broken, and the oak parlour (which her ladyship always wants to have shown to her friends) is redolent of the fumes of some black polishing-varnish, with which Miss Somerset has been converting plain deal chairs into ebony, before the keynote of perfect harmony is struck in the following words:

“Your place is in its usual perfect order, I see that at a glance, Mrs. Mellon. Miss Heatherley—this young lady with me—is

something of an artist, and I have got her to promise to make me a sketch of your oak-panelled parlour. Would it be inconvenient for you to let her see it to-day?"

Again the sensation of being struck by lightning, which irradiates everything that had better for the time be kept in darkness, assails Mrs. Mellon. How shall she dare to take her ladyship into a room that smells strongly of ebonising-varnish, and that is being turned upside-down by a young lady who has marred her faultless beauty in Mrs. Mellon's eyes for the time, through having arrayed herself in a neat workmanlike suit that "really might almost be worn by a boy." How shall she dare to take Lady St. Just into such a head-centre of confusion as this oak parlour now represents? On the other hand, how shall she dare to refuse her (Lady St. Just) admission? "And how will Miss Somerset take it." This thought is the sharpest dagger-thrust of all, for sweet Lily Somerset has obtained unlimited sway over Mrs. Mellon's unsophisticated mind, and the

good woman is astonished herself that not one of her kith and kin has the power to wound or heal her, that is vested in her lovely young lady-lodger.

However, on this occasion, Mrs. Mellon finds a way out of the maze of her uncertainty, made for her faltering feet by Miss Somerset herself.

For Lily, having seen that Lady St. Just's companion is none other than that other one whom she (Lily) cannot oust from Walter's heart, in spite of all the badly-authenticated stories of fickleness and falseness with which she has assiduously plied him, longs to meet Ethel at close quarters.

"You don't mean to tell me that you're going to let Mrs. Mellon show Lady St. Just and that girl into this room, for them to stare round and behave as if we were part of the furniture," Miss Gifford pouts, when Lily tells her that she has given Mrs. Mellon permission to show the oak parlour as usual.

"They won't look upon me as 'mere furniture,'" Lily laughs. "Don't be afraid,

Mabel. . If either Miss Heatherley or I are to be discomfited to-day, it won't be—me!”

“You'll not let yourself down by seeming to know anything about her, Lily?”

“I am not going to tell you what I shall do, or what I shall leave undone, for I don't know myself, yet. I only know that Walter has promised to come here this afternoon! I only want to show him that I don't wish to avert a meeting between him and his—*real*—love!”

“Oh! Lily! Why do you call her that? the treacherous, false creature; marrying an old man because he's a marquis, and has money, after carrying on with Walter till the dear boy was so *won* by her that it seems cruel to be glad that she has deserted him; and now that everything seems so pleasant and right between you and Walter; now that the real, good love for you is reasserting itself so sensibly, it's hard, it's more than hard, that you should give a helping-hand to his meeting with her again.”

“May I venture to remind you that I understand Walter better than you do,” Lily says, in reply to this. “When he knows that she is engaged to another man, wild horses won’t get him to go near her with a word or a look of love. Walter is a very honourable man, and in his honourableness he can be very cruel. I mean him to be cruel to Miss Heatherley if he meets her here to-day.”

With this, Lily closes her lips and the subject, and resumes her occupation of ebonising her chair, while Mabel Gifford fidgets about the room, fretting her soul in silence for a few minutes.

Presently she pauses in her purposeless ramble; her ears are quick to catch the first sound of the coming struggle.

“I hear Walter’s horse trotting round to the stable; he’ll be here in a minute; do let me send word to Mrs. Mellon that we’re engaged, and can’t have those ladies in here?”

“I have said those ladies are to come,” Lily says, springing to her feet, with the light of

defiant excitement illuminating her face, and the thrill of the same feeling imparting an additional air of force and grace to her figure.

“Will you keep—won’t you change that dress?” Miss Gifford suggests, casting a glance of timorous disapproval at the boy’s blouse, and the extremely short and tight skirt, which leaves Lily’s pretty feet and ankles fully exposed.

“No! Why should I? my dress suits my work.”

“It may strike them as being rather masculine,” Mabel says, hesitatingly, then the moment for either admonition or appeal is past, for there comes a knock at the door, and Mrs. Mellon’s voice is heard requesting permission for “the ladies” to enter.

“Come in,” Lily says, in a voice that rings like a silver bell, and Lady St. Just marches in with so martial a mien, that Mabel involuntarily shrinks into obscurity, in the shade of the highest piece of furniture, while Lily advances with a dazzling smile, that makes

Ethel think of the electric light, "or burning day-light," and courteously offers the room for their inspection.

It is in vain that Mabel offers up a piteous prayer for her brother's prolonged absence. Even now, while Lily is doing the honours of the old oak parlour, pointing out the beauty of the folded-linen-pattern carving on the panels, and the perfectly proportioned grace of arch over the fire-place, Walter walks unconcernedly into the room, and stops as if he had been shot.

Lady St. Just has been anticipating both amusement and benefit from this meeting for which she has schemed so artlessly. The amusement is to be her portion, the benefit, Ethel's eventually! But this!—this arrival of Mr. Gifford's is altogether more than she bargained for when negotiating the affair with Fate and Chance.

There is a moment's pause, during which Ethel rapidly puts everything she has heard respecting Walter and Walter's sister's friend together. These ladies whom Lady St. Just

has entrapped her into intruding upon, are that sister and her friend, of course? And oh! not for half an instant does Ethel doubt that the lovely star-like girl, with the clear, silvery voice, to whom shy Ethel listened a minute ago, with appreciative pleasure, is the friend!

During that moment's pause, too, Mabel totteringly emerges from the shadow of the old buffet, and begins to try and tell her brother that she "cannot help," something or other which she does not clearly define, while Lily leans her arms on the back of a high chair, and gazes over it at the group, trying to still the horrible thumping at her heart, with the thought of what an effective picture she will paint some day of this scene, from her point of view!

The momentary pause of pain, joy, fear, doubt, utter perplexity on the part of Walter Gifford comes to an end. With his customary firm, decided step, his own old, honest, honesty-compelling smile, he goes straight to Ethel and takes her hand, and says—

“Ethel! Are you as glad to see me as I am to see you again?”

“I am as glad as I dare to be,” Ethel says, leaving her hand in his as she speaks, without a thought of Lady St. Just’s probable wrath; of lovely Lily; or, indeed, of anyone or anything save her odious bondage to the Marquis of Monkstown, through her mother’s folly!

“My dear Ethel,” Lady St. Just puts in, swooping upon the unhappy pair, who are groping about in the dim light of mutual misunderstanding, “will you have a little consideration for me in my position of outsider, and introduce me to this gentleman whom you seem to know so well?”

“Mr. Gifford—Lady St. Just,” Ethel says, hesitatingly, for she knows that the introduction is merely one to an unpleasantness for Walter.

“This unexpected pleasure is, indeed, great,” the old lady says, in the suavest accents she can command. “I have heard much (and much that is favourable, allow me to

add) of Mr. Gifford; to meet him now for the first time in the presence of Miss Somerset, is to me a double pleasure; but we must remember that Mr. Gifford's time is precious; and we must not interfere with his intended disposal of it."

She looks round the circle with a general smile, that seems to demand their approbation of her sentiment, and of the keen appreciation she has of the little difficulties of the situation. What "a well-bred, kind-hearted old lady," Miss Gifford thinks her, to be sure; for all these delicately-garbed allusions to an "understanding," at least, between Walter and Lily, falls harmoniously on his sister's ears. What a dunder-headed old diplomat Lily thinks her, but she thinks it tolerantly, for—indifferently as she is doing it—Lady St. Just is playing Lily's game. What "a malignant old witch," Walter thinks her, for he knows that though she is firing at random, that her shot goes very near the bull's eye, when she implies that he belongs to Lily now.

As for Ethel, no thought of Lily disturbs her mind! Her one feeling is that she only is to blame for whatever may be that is wrong. She has been impetuous; she has been silly in renouncing Walter; and she has been wicked in allowing herself to be engaged to an old man for whom she has neither love nor respect, now that he has degraded himself by seeking to make such an incongruous alliance. There is pleasure, there is pathos, there is pleading, there is pain in the face that is upturned to Walter's, and all these feelings find expression in the words—

“Oh! Walter, how I wish there was no one to order us away from each other!”

At this, lissom Lily draws herself up to the utmost of her fair stature, and smiles “like an angel,” Mabel Gifford thinks; but Walter knows that the smile is a challenge for him to declare himself on *her* side! Now!—without delay, if he ever means to do so.

And he knows further that she is justified in thus challenging him to be outspoken now,

though he has been justified to himself for not having been so before. For since that matter of her buying the practice, and then forgiving him sweetly, as she did, for not accepting the great gift her love and generosity would have given him, Walter Gifford has let himself lapse into the old habit of liking Lily more than a little, and showing that liking in a manner that a woman can only construe in one way.

He owes it to Lily now to say something that shall show Ethel Heatherley that her claims are superseded!

For one miserable moment he hesitates, then, as he is about to say something that shall show Ethel that he loves her still, though honour forces him to leave the decision of his fate in Miss Somerset's hands, Lady St. Just plays the strongest card in her hand, obnoxious as the necessity for doing so is to her.

"I am afraid I must order you away now, dear Ethel. Lord Monkstown is leaving a very precious charge in my hands in the

person of you, his promised wife, and I must show myself worthy of his confidence by taking you home before it gets dark, and the night-air dangerous; as a medical man I am sure Mr. Gifford will agree with me," her ladyship says, with a snarling smile.



CHAPTER III.

ETHEL'S FORLORN HOPE FAILS HER !

AS a medical man, he may possibly agree with her. As a mere man, with a mere man's vital interests at issue, he does nothing of the kind.

Ethel has instinctively moved away from him while Lady St. Just has been uttering her cutting reminder—moved away under the influence of the cruel recollection that she has, by her forced assent to her mother's scheme, given Lord Monkstown the right to order her goings, and hold other people responsible to him about her. Under the influence of this recollection, she draws away from Walter, feeling that, however temporary her seeming disloyalty to him may be if fate and her mother and Lord Monkstown are merciful, that the mere ap-

pearance of it makes her unworthy of Walter, robs her of the privilege of claiming support and countenance from him now.

But Walter follows her; forgetful for the moment of all his own perplexities about Lily, forgetful of everything but the rage that influences his heart against any man who dares to claim Ethel as his promised wife away from him, Walter Gifford, follows her, and asks her—

“I have heard this before, and refused to believe a word of it; but now! that it is said before you, and you don’t deny it! what can I think, what can I think?”

“You can’t help thinking badly of me,” Ethel is beginning, when the pain he feels makes him discourteously impatient—

“Then it is true? God bless you, Ethel, and God forgive those who have brought it about. I can’t. The end has come for us, surely enough.”

With this he turns away, and gets himself out of the room, and Lily Somerset feels half-repentantly, half-rejoicingly—

“The end has come for them now! Ring out the false, ring in the true. I’ll be stauncher to him than that brave-faced brunette has been, after all!”

“He is gone!” These words forced themselves out of Ethel’s mouth, in a tone of surprised pain and disappointment. They seem to plead for pity and sympathy from those who have witnessed the way in which she has been rebuffed and humiliated. Then suddenly she knows, as well as if they told her so in so many words, that not one of them has pity or sympathy; that they are all glad that Walter has resigned her, and that she is standing alone in the world, as far as her wishes are concerned. Her mother is on the winning Monkstown side, and every one else seems to follow her mother’s lead.

She is not disposed to oppose meekness to their triumphant sense of her having been worsted, and she is too just in the midst of her own agony to really blame or hate the woman who is evidently waiting for the man, and as evidently winning him, who has been

frittered away from her by her own mother and her own weak will. But though she can, by an immense effort, compass generosity enough for this, she cannot bear their pitilessness and want of sympathy any longer.

“Come, Lady St. Just,” she says, inclining her head in cold farewell to Mrs. Mellon’s two lady-lodgers. “You have done what you came to do; why should we intrude on these ladies any longer?”

“I am afraid I must wait for my sketch till another opportunity,” Lady St. Just says, apologetically, to Miss Somerset. “So much time has been given to social amenities that the interests of art have suffered; perhaps you will permit me to bring my friend, Miss Heatherley, on some other occasion to take a sketch of this charming room?”

“Always delighted to see you and any of your friends,” Miss Somerset replies. These two ladies are doing no violence to their feelings in being gracious to one another; the detachment of Ethel Heatherley from Mr. Gifford is an achievement on which they have

both expended their best efforts. What wonder, now that it is completed, that they are well satisfied, and gracious to one another.

But this very graciousness of Lily's is an extra drop of bitterness in Ethel's cup. "How *sure* she must be of him to be easy and good-humoured as she is," Ethel thinks, as she hurries away out of the sound of any more delicately-tipped arrows. "I want no second sight of the room; it's photographed in my memory too clearly for me to need to see it again in order to be able to sketch it."

She is seated in the carriage, and has time to compose herself, outwardly at any rate, before Lady St. Just comes up. For Lady St. Just feels that, unless the girl has time given her to remember her bounden duty and service to the man to whom she has permitted her mother to promise her in marriage, she may break all bonds, defy Lady St. Just, and declare recklessly for the old love again. So, in order to give her this time for the composure of her nerves, and the recovery of

her sense of the fitness of things, Lady St. Just loiters along slowly through the passages and garden, affecting a great interest in all things as she passes, and reducing Mrs. Mellon to a state of nervous despondency, by reason of the fear that good woman has of any unsuspected (by her) short-comings making themselves manifest to her ladyship's eagle eye.

"Tired of waiting for me, Ethel?" she asks, cheerfully, as she seats herself by Ethel's side, and the horses go off at a springy trot.

"Not at all," Ethel rejoins, coldly. The girl has argued with herself, and convinced herself that it was inevitable from the first that Walter should hear of Lord Monkstown, and equally inevitable that on hearing of Lord Monkstown, he (Walter) should renounce her. But she is unable to forgive Lady St. Just for the ruthless manner in which she made her mention of the matter.

"What a contrast there is between the weather we are having now and that we had

while we were touring about together?" her ladyship goes on, pleasantly.

"There is a hideous contrast between then and now," Ethel replies. Then she throws off all sham composure, and says, excitedly:—

"How could you speak so cruelly to Mr. Gifford of Lord Monkstown? how could you stab him so? He has never injured you, or tried to force himself upon you! Why should you have been the one to hurt him with the blunt truth about my weak falseness?"

"Because there was no one else to do it, dear child, and it was quite time that the blunt truth, as you call it, should be told to him. I'm not a partisan of Lord Monkstown's myself, as you know, but he did as well as another to-day to warn off trespassers. Besides, Ethel, your dignity was at stake; couldn't you see that your friend, Mr. Gifford, was in an uncomfortable dilemma? It was thoughtless and inconsiderate of you to let that really sweet-

looking girl, Miss Somerset, see that you thought yours the prior and stronger claim to him."

"If he could only have heard it in the way I meant to tell him," poor Ethel goes on; "he knows how mother sways me, he would have pitied me; but now he can do nothing but despise me and dislike me, and however good Lord Monkstown may be to me, I shall never be anything to Walter again."

"Never, you may rest assured of that, and behave yourself accordingly, my dear," Lady St. Just says, philosophically; "and wounding as it may be to you to hear it, I really believe that in a short time Mr. Gifford will feel grateful to you for having cut the knot of his difficulties; he will find solace in a wealthy and very pretty wife, and he will not have it on his conscience that he has been obliged to jilt you in order to get her."

"You'll never cure me by saying such things, I know him better than you do, and

I know that though he may be led to do it, he'll never find solace in a marriage with Miss Somerset—you may smile as incredulously as you will, I know it."

"I care very little whether he does or not. Really, Ethel, I hadn't a notion that your pretty little head was so full of romantic, exploded nonsense; on the whole, I am not sure that Lord Monkstown isn't the right man for you after all; your keen sense of the incongruous will make you root out all pernicious sentimentalism when you find yourself the wife of a man of sixty."

"When I do that my keen sense of the incongruous will make me root out every bit of good feeling that's in me now," the girl says, wearily, and a pang shoots through her old friend's heart, as she remembers her own words spoken to Ethel's mother—"A great deal of her fondness must go before she can marry Monkstown, and when a girl's fondness goes other things follow."

There is no more said between them on this subject now, nor for many days to

come. Lady St. Just is only too glad to let sleeping dogs lie, and Ethel knows that all her words to Lady St. Just are in vain.

“As will her words to her mother and to Lord Monkstown be also,” she begins to fear; and then she tries to picture what the remainder of her life will be if a great calamity does come to pass, and she becomes a marchioness and an envied woman in society.

Thoughts of Kenmare often darken and distress her mind during these dismal days. What sort of a home will his father’s house be for the son, if she is the father’s wife and the house’s mistress? She seems destined to bring sorrow and destruction upon those she loves and likes. After persistently repulsing Kenmare as she had done, on the grounds of her greater love for another, what hard things will Kenmare not be justified in thinking of her, if she casts out that greater love and marries Kenmare’s father? The contemplation of this part

of the picture of the future, is only one degree less maddening than some of those scenes from the past which are indelibly imprinted on her mind. Wherever she looks, backwards or forwards, the marks of fickleness, falseness, and treachery to those she loves, are upon her.

Lady St. Just's permission is never accorded in any form of words, but Lord Monkstown comes without it, in the course of a few days, and seems quite as sanguine of a good reception as if both Ethel and her hostess had written letters of rejoicing at the prospect of seeing him.

That Ethel shrinks from him, averts her eyes, and gives him her hand so coldly that he checks himself in his first evident intention of kissing her on the brow, does not surprise, neither does it depress him. Her silence has led him to suspect that the rapturous delight at the engagement expressed in her mother's letter, is confined entirely to her mother's bosom. But he can bear her indifference, if Ethel will only keep her bright-

ness and beauty. So now, though she holds him at arm's length, he preserves an air of being well pleased with his reception.

"You know, of course, that the Bishop and Mrs. Templeton are coming home in two or three days, Ethel ; I shall then be a guest at the Palace, and certain arrangements, which are necessary, can be carried out with more convenience and celerity," he tells her, and she knows that he means the arrangements for their marriage.

"Mother coming home already? surely, surely, not!"

"Mrs. Templeton is acceding to *my* request in thus amiably curtailing her wedding tour."

"Why?"

"Because I am anxious to commence my own, and Mrs. Templeton is humane enough not to put any obstacle in my way," he tells her, lifting her hand to his lips as he speaks, with an air of by-gone gallantry that makes her feel inclined to cast herself on her knees before him, and implore him, by the remem-

brance of his age and her youth, to pity her and set her free.

But she checks the impulse to act thus. An undefined dread of Lady St. Just's hearing of it, and casting ridicule on her for having done it, a shrinking from being called "emotional" and "sensational," as well as "sentimental" and "romantic," restrains the girl from making her appeal from her heart, on her knees, as her impulse would lead her to do. No! she will make it earnestly and urgently, but it shall be from her head! it shall appeal to him as a man of the world and a gentleman, and if it fails! well, if it fails! time enough when it does to think of what must follow.

"Lord Monkstown," she begins, standing very erect before him, in a way that unfortunately displays the proportions of her perfect figure to the best advantage before his admiring and enamoured eyes. "Lord Monkstown, in what I am going to say, I don't think you can detect a shadow of ingratitude to you for the honour you have

done: I am thankful to you for the wish you have to be good to my mother and to me; I know how generous you are disposed to be to her; I know how generous you have been already, and (to my sorrow) know how great she thinks her need is of your generosity. Knowing all this, I should be a greater coward than I am, a worse girl than I am, if I did not tell you all about myself that my mother has left untold, and ask you to believe that you and I shall both be happier if you will give me back my promise to be your wife, and be my friend only still."

In her grave earnestness she is fraught with more womanly grace than he has ever remembered in her in her most buoyant moments; and the keen perception he has of this is a powerful adversary to her hope of winning him to release her.

"I think Mrs. Templeton has told me quite as much as it is necessary a man should learn from another, of his future wife, and I can save you the trouble of dwelling at length on unimportant circumstances, by telling you at

once that I am more than satisfied, and that I would not desire to have anything altered, either in you or in the conditions of your past life."

She begins to feel that he will be inflexible in demanding from her the complete fulfilment of the pledge her mother has given in her name. She begins to feel that there is no escape for her! that she will be forced on by an irresistible power to redeem it! Still, she will bare her wound before him, and if he has the heart to lacerate it further, at least he shall never have it to say that she has deceived him.

"In telling you of the circumstances and conditions of my former life, has my mother told you of my attachment and engagement to Mr. Gifford?"

"She mentioned that a girlish infatuation existed at one time, and gave me to understand that it had been overcome."

"Then, Lord Monkstown, my mother deceived you," Ethel says, with fresh energy and hope. And now her eyes sparkle, and her

cheeks flush, and her lips quiver sensitively, and altogether, strong feeling adds so many fresh charms to her beauty, that her chances of getting an order of release from Lord Monkstown are more feeble than ever.

“I will be no party to that deception,” she goes on, vehemently; “the ‘infatuation’ as she calls it, the real love as I know it to be, is as strong as ever in my heart for Mr. Gifford. When my mother got me to agree with—with her wishes and yours, I did not feel that what I said was final. I had a hope, faint and vague, but still a hope, that Mr. Gifford would stand by me and set me free——”

“I am to understand that hope exists no longer?” he asks, with deferential sympathy.

“That hope exists no longer; he told me that the ‘end had come for us,’ and quite gave me up, when he heard from *me* of you; but understand this, Lord Monkstown, I love him quite as much as ever, though he has given me up.”

She says her words so distinctly and im-

pressively that he cannot doubt for a moment that she means them to the fullest extent of their meaning, and he winces under the unflattering conviction. But his will is strong to have her for his own, and since this other man has resigned her, and her mother's welfare is involved in Ethel's becoming his wife, he tries to make himself believe that it will be more merciful to make her a successful and secure woman against her will, than to let her return to miserable maiden meditation and freedom.

So he tells her that her generous confidence and noble frankness have still further endeared her to him. And then goes on to explain to her, that experience goes to prove that what people call indiscriminately, "love" and "heart," are in reality not at all essential elements in the married state.

"Competence, confidence, and a cordial recognition on either side of the right the other has to so much liberty of action as is compatible with the preservation of home-peace and happiness; these, I take it, are

the chief conditions to be fulfilled in the matrimonial state; and it is the desirability of his seeking one who will be an efficient aid to him in carrying out these conditions that I am always anxious to impress upon Kenmare," Lord Monkstown goes on, diverging from the subject of his own marriage in a way that makes Ethel feel, and that is designed to make Ethel feel, that he regards his own marriage as an unalterable and securely-settled thing.

"They are not enough," Ethel says.

"Indeed! then may I ask what more you would have?" he asks, suavely, and Ethel says,

"Love is enough! nothing else."

"Ah, I think I have seen that sentiment elongated into a sonnet by one of our modern bards of the sunflower and blue china cult, and I really think it very creditable, shall I say, that they who have so little else to live upon as a rule, should try and convince themselves that love *is* enough. Will you like to read a portion of Mrs. Templeton's

last letter to me?" he goes on; "it really is quite delightful to meet with such a bright, contented, buoyant nature; she is flinging herself with the ardour of a girl into the subject of the plans and pavement of the new conservatory she intends building, and she says, 'I hope Ethel's good sense——' No, that's another passage. This is the one I want you to hear, 'I hope my sweet Ethel's good taste will employ itself in helping me to select tiles that will be in perfect accord with foliage, flowers, ferns, and any dresses that may sweep over the floor!'"

Ethel laughs shortly, as Lord Monkstown looks up at her with a vain attempt at expressing in his face admiration of that which he has been affecting to admire in Mrs. Templeton, and sympathy with her frivolous zeal about the unbuilt conservatory.

"My 'good taste' will refrain from employing itself in helping my mother to spend *that* money, Lord Monkstown. Can't you understand why?"

“ I shall never ask you to give me a reason that you do not volunteer, for anything,” he replies, gallantly, and Ethel feels that he is impracticable, and that he will take, having the power, and will keep while he can.



CHAPTER IV.

“HEART OF LEAD, AND HEART OF
FEATHER.”

THE Bishop and Mrs. Templeton are at home, after a brief honeymoon, and the already well-informed Miss Templeton is rapidly acquiring fresh and unpalatable knowledge, under the auspices of her charming, attractive little step-mother.

The first lesson she is taught is the hard one of enforced humility. Before the return of the happy pair, Fanny has injudiciously communicated to many people her fixed resolve to “assert her position in the Palace, and maintain it, from the first hour of Mrs. Templeton’s return.” But, in spite of her good inclination to carry out this fixed resolve, she finds herself compelled to abandon it, at the easy, *nonchalant* suggestion of Mrs. Templeton, within twenty-four hours of that lady’s ascending the throne.

They are at breakfast the morning after the return of the bride and bridegroom, when the first struggle for supremacy takes place. The Bishop, his daughter, and Ethel, have been punctual to the hour named for that meal, but Mrs. Templeton has kept them waiting half-an-hour. Once Fanny makes a feint of taking her accustomed seat behind the coffee-pot and urn, but on her father's remarking—

“Mrs. Templeton will expect to find her place vacant when she comes down, Fanny,” she as huffily vacated it, reminding him at the same time that his medical men have always averred that nothing is so injurious to his constitution as to be up and about long before he breaks his fast.

“At least let me pour you out a cup of coffee, papa? Mrs. Templeton can scarcely wish you to parade authority at the cost of your health, perhaps of your life,” she says; and the Bishop negatives the proposition touchily, and adds—

“Mrs. Templeton has a great dislike to

seeing the breakfast table disarranged before she comes down."

At this, Fanny rings the bell, and gives an elaborate direction to the servant who answers it, to the effect that he is to ask the house-keeper to be good enough to send a cup of tea and slice of toast up to her (Miss Templeton's) room; a proceeding which the Bishop protests against faintly, but does not like to actually forbid, fearing that his child may turn and rend him with cutting accusations of his having gone over to the other side, leaving her forlorn and friendless.

But ere he can quite make up his mind what it will be wisest, that is, safest, for him to do, his indisputably better-half comes into the room, bringing with her a certain aroma of fresh air, that proves, though Mrs. Templeton is late for breakfast, she has been no sluggard this morning.

"I met a cup of tea and some deliciously-crisp toast on its way to your room, Fanny," she says, holding her prettily-tinted cheek towards her step-daughter for the latter to kiss,

“so I ordered them back here. I disapprove exceedingly of bedroom breakfasts.”

“We had almost despaired of seeing you this morning, my dear,” the Bishop says, deprecatingly, hoping to avert the rising storm.

“I am sure, papa, you will not sanction Mrs. Templeton’s interference with any orders concerning myself only, which I may give in the house of which I have been sole mistress so long,” Fanny says, bristling at the Bishop in a way that makes the latter feel his age and weakness poignantly. Why, oh! why, will these two women, his nearest and dearest, wage war with one another about trifles light as air, and devastate him in his own hitherto peaceful Palace? He tries to evade answering his daughter, by putting on the appearance of intense interest in the contents of the covered, but still cooling, dishes on the breakfast table. But his little *ruse* fails.

“Did you not hear what your daughter said, dear?” his wife says to him, with ominous suavity; “surely you will answer her

appeal, made, with the utmost good taste, in my presence."

"It was far better and braver that Fanny should say what she did before you, than behind your back, mother," Ethel puts in, warmly, and Mrs. Templeton, remembering all she owes to Ethel's passive submission to her will, forbears on this occasion, and finds her way out of the impending difficulty with her customary tact:

"Dearest child, you are always right," she says, admiringly; "it was 'better and braver,' as you so prettily and truthfully say, on Fanny's part. I only felt hurt for the moment that you should have deemed me capable of the injustice which you suggested to the Bishop," she adds, turning to Fanny, who, sorely against her will, is compelled, by the politeness of the explanation, to sit down with the others to breakfast, as if nothing had happened.

"And now," Mrs. Templeton says, with the gaiety of a girl who has committed a harmless escapade, "I will tell you why I was an

absentee this morning ; I have been for more than an hour discussing plans with Bolt, and really, without boasting, I may say we have done wonders already, short as the time has been. We have chalked out the site, selected the tiles, and actually commenced operations ; men are digging out the trenches for the walls, and Bolt has signed an agreement to have it finished, glassed in, and ready for the plants by this day three weeks ; haven't I been energetic? ”

“ You have indeed,” the Bishop says, approvingly ; but her father's approbation does not appease Fanny's utter antagonism to her step-mother's high-spirited and expensive hobby.

“ I'm afraid Bolt over-rates the revenues of the bishopric of Allerton Towers, or he would not have signed such a contract in faith, at your request, Mrs. Templeton.”

“ I think Bolt quite understands that the revenue of the bishopric will not be drawn upon for payment for my little piece of innocent extravagance, Fanny ; he is quite content

to take my promise to pay; it will be quite a miniature Crystal Palace—ninety feet long, and sixty wide. Ethel, dear, I shall ask you to send me over every Irish fern that grows, and acres of shamrock—I mean to have a large bed of the chosen leaf of bard and chief; and you shall get me a small arbutus tree from Killarney, and a real little Irish oak from Lord Monkstown’s estate, for me to plant on the first anniversary of your wedding-day.”

Ethel masters herself sufficiently to refrain from shuddering at this allusion to her obnoxious future, but Fanny Templeton sees the indignant look of reproach which the girl levels at her mother, and is not slow in construing it aright.

“None but a mother could manage to bring in an allusion to the happy day so cleverly,” Miss Templeton says, with a vicious shake of her virgin head. “Ethel! how you miss your opportunities! why don’t you render your arbutus and shamrock with more graceful readiness?”

"I am sure of one thing, and that is, that Lord Monkstown will not grudge them to me," Mrs. Templeton says, in that arch and affectedly playful manner, that is so maddening to a hearer whose soul is sick.

"I am quite longing to see this enterprising nobleman," Fanny says, as sweetly as if she were unconscious of wounding, with every word she speaks, the girl who has never wronged or wounded her; "does he make love as ardently and agreeably as his son did, Ethel? such gifts are frequently hereditary, I believe."

"Don't let us waste the whole morning at the breakfast table," Mrs. Templeton says, quickly, rising as she speaks; "come, my dear, I want your opinion about my conservatory; the plans are on the library-table, and as I have already made my choice, you will only have to admire, not to decide."

She puts her hand on the Bishop's arm, and leads him from the room, to gaze with amazed horror at the portentous proportions of the models his wife has selected. He is

not in possession of any facts concerning his wife's monetary affairs, and his soul grows dark within him, as visions of getting into debt, through her agency, to every tradesman in his diocese, floats before his mind's eye.

"It will be the largest and handsomest conservatory in Allerton Towers, Bolt tells me," Mrs. Templeton says, triumphantly.

"I fear it will cost a great deal!" the Bishop replies.

"The cost is quite a secondary consideration," the lady says, carelessly; and the Bishop groans in spirit as she goes on to tell him of a window she is going to have made over the drawing-room fire-place, looking into the conservatory.

"That will involve altering the chimney, and will really add alarmingly to the expense," he protests, looking and feeling aghast at her recklessness.

"But consider the exquisite effect, especially at night!" she says, gaily; "why should 'expense' be made such a bug-bear? When

the lamp is lighted in the conservatory at night, and we are sitting cosily before the fire, feasting our eyes on gorgeous tropical flowers and foliage, seen through the window, you will admit that so delightful and unusual an effect is well worth the few hundreds it will cost."

"Hundreds!" the Bishop ejaculates. With all his heart now he wishes he had hearkened to his daughter's counsel, and cut himself adrift from his spendthrift widow before she became his wife. It is too late to so free himself now, but for his honour's sake he will remonstrate with and check her in her mad career of unwarrantable extravagance. "I cannot—positively I cannot, and will not sanction your having a conservatory built on such a scale, nor will I allow the alterations you propose to be made. I shall tell Bolt that he must take orders on the subject from me only, and unless he gives me a reasonable estimate I shall forbid the work being begun."

"But it *is* begun," she says, carelessly;

“there are several men hard at work already digging out the foundations ; and as for your telling Bolt that he is to take orders from you only, it’s too ridiculous a threat for me to think of it for a moment, much less to be deterred by it. Bolt will take orders from the one to whom he will look for payment, and, as I am that one, I must beg that you don’t interfere with my arrangements for improving your house and making it a fit place for my daughter to come to when she is Marchioness of Monkstown.”

The Bishop is considerably cowed, not only by the length of this address, but by the cool indifference which marks the manner in which it is delivered. Still, cowed though he is, the importance of the subject under debate, and his holy horror of owing any man aught, impels him to make a further effort to stand to his guns.

“Excuse me,” he says, gravely ; “I have never asked for your confidence respecting your money-matters. I have waited for you to give it to me.”

“I quite appreciate the delicacy of such conduct, and trust that it may continue; curiosity, especially about money-matters, is such an ignoble thing,” she interrupts, in her sweetest tones, but the honey is wasted on the Bishop to-day.

“I have waited for you to give it to me unasked,” he says, with ominous solemnity. He has found this manner efficacious in the taming of turbulent chaplains before now. And little he recks how absolutely it will be thrown away upon the gentle partner of his home and heart.

“And I have not given it,” she puts in.

“Now I ask you, I entreat you, Mrs. Templeton. I will not say I command——”

“No! you had better not,” her suave voice says.

“But I entreat you, for the sake of avoiding undignified discussions and dissensions in the future, to tell me frankly and fairly what your income is, and from where derived, in order that I may be able to judge what expenditure is justifiable on your part in this

establishment, and, what is imprudent, not to say dishonest.”

During the whole of this exordium, delivered much after the manner of a Charge, the lady against whom it is being fulminated, plays, with idle grace, with a large ivory paper-knife. When the Bishop ceases speaking, and sits in silent expectancy awaiting her explanation, she throws the knife down with an impatient gesture, and rises, the plan of the contested conservatory in her hand.

“I am sorry to have to alter the opinion I had formed as to your tact and delicacy,” she says, gliding towards the door, and out of the argument. “I am sorry to have to refuse a request of yours, however bluntly and awkwardly made; but do understand clearly, please! that I shall *not* render an account of either the source from whence my income is derived, or of the manner in which it is spent. The information would not benefit you in any way; why should I give it you, therefore? It is against my principles that a wife should have no individuality, no separate status and

existence, and I should have neither if I delivered my money-matters up into your hands."

"Mrs. Templeton, I must insist upon having some sort of statement of assurance from you that you are able to meet the debts which I fear you are only too ready to incur," the Bishop says, with a shaking voice. For so good a man as he undoubtedly is, passion has taken possession of him very completely. A vague fear that his dignity and honour will suffer at the hands of the calm and smiling, but defiant lady, who has opposed and worsted him in this their first trial of strength, overpowers him, and makes him nervous and unable to rise to those heights from whence he can command the situation. He knows as soon as the word "insist" has passed his lips, that he has made a false step in using it. It is awful to him that something very like a quarrel should come off between his new wife and himself, within the precincts of his Palace the very day after returning home. It is awful to him that he should be compelled to use

words of censure and reproof to one whom he had hoped would adorn and dignify his high position in the church and world. Above all it is awful to him to feel that he has no more power to regulate or control this gentle-voiced, kittenish little woman, than he has to regulate the wind or the waves! She will gang her own gait! She will give freely while she has the power! Give orders, money, patronage! “Where will it end?” the Bishop asks, thinking of that conservatory, and of that even more appalling window over the fireplace. And he has said that he “insists” upon an explanation of the state of her affairs from her! Oh! weak and vain is such insistence he feels, as she turns round in the doorway, making her exit after a fashion she has approved in the daringly-graceful Terry’s, and says—

“No; don’t say you insist, because you have no means of making me comply. I shall not give you a statement of my circumstances, because I know them to be in such a perfectly satisfactory state that I feel I can defray any

debts I may incur; your daughter's dishonourable doubts of me are affecting you, I fear; but I will let this unpleasantness pass without reproach, if you on your side will promise that for the future you will be more reliant and reasonable?"

"At this early stage of married life, it is strange indeed that you should speak to me in this way," the Bishop says, plaintively.

"It is much better that I should speak and settle these trifles once for all, at an early stage, than leave it to lag on to a later period, when custom may have made us callous to each other's wishes," she says, brightly. Then, with the view of ending a profitless discussion, she vanishes from the room with a blithe nod and smile, carrying her conservatory plans with her.

For some reason or other the Bishop's mind dwells greatly on Jezebel this day.

And all the time this "heart of feather" is floating about in the midst of masons and carpenters, Ethel, with a "heart of lead," is preparing for the advent amongst them,

in a recognised position, of her future lord!

“Will he stand by quietly and see my own mother murdering me?” the girl asks herself; and then she tries blindly to conjecture what the strong motive may be which makes her mother sacrifice her child’s body and soul for lucre!

“I can never carry out my part of the bargain,” she tells herself, and then like a child she hopefully promises herself that Lord Monkstown will release her.



CHAPTER V.

BY THE RUSSIAN VIOLETS.

IT is in all respects a dreadful day, that on which the Marquis of Monkstown arrives at the Palace as a guest, and Ethel Heatherley's recognized future husband. The weather is bad in the first place; therefore the Bishop is unable to get out and "potter about," which is the phrase his new wife uses to designate his hitherto revered ramblings. The weather, too, is not only antagonistic to the Bishop's "pottering," but to the furtherance of the conservatory. Consequently, both he and Mrs. Templeton are out of gear, and disposed to see, perhaps, not the worst, but certainly the untoward side of things.

All the maid-servants attached to the palatial staff are in sullen, silent rebellion. Never in the history of man—or at least in their lives and within the limits of their

experiences—have they witnessed so much dust and disorder as now reigns in the drawing-room wing. Mrs. Templeton, beautifully shod, and clad in a dust-cloak that envelopes her figure more gracefully than the same garment would another woman, tramps in and out over bricks and mortar and broken glass, without getting cut or scratch to her feet, or flying atom in her eye. But the entrance-hall looks like a mason's yard, and the drawing-room like a whited sepulchre, the servants aver; and, in truth, they like this period of transition and preparation as little as Miss Templeton does.

The Bishop, finding it all vanity and weariness, and being, moreover, mightily oppressed by the dread—which his wife's asseverations to the contrary are powerless to disperse—that eventually he will be called upon to pay for it, sits in his library alone!

He can neither read nor write, nor meditate on good and peaceful things, for the incessant knocking and planing, and hammering, jars upon his nerves, and threatens to break the

drum of his ears. He cannot take refuge in his daughter's sitting-room, which is farther removed from the hubbub, because that unflinching young mentor rarely addresses other words to him than of reproof and exhortation. Reproof of a peculiarly biting nature, because peculiarly well-merited, for his weakness in the past regarding the widow; exhortation on the subject of the best means for him to employ in the subjugation of his independent-spirited and extravagant wife!

To him, knowing as he does what wax he is in the hands of the latter, these exhortations are fraught with even more humiliation than he feels in the contemplation of the past from his daughter's point of view. And when Fanny tells him roundly that she, for one, shall lose all respect for him if he does not "assert himself," and "compel Mrs. Templeton to recognise his authority," and "put down all her unjustifiable and becoming extravagancies with a strong hand," the poor Bishop can only find it in his heart to creep away to the

solitude of his library, and feed upon the thought of his own helplessness, in his silent heart.

Unfortunately for the Bishop, he has not Mr. Grove's strength to lean upon at this juncture. The private chaplain is away staying with his old friend, the new Bishop of Fitz-Spitzburg, previous to the latter's departure for his foreign field of action and sphere of labour, to which he is about to swoop off a strong corps of earnest and enthusiastic volunteers. Mr. Grove is one of these, but his departure is to be delayed for a time, until the Bishop of Allerton Towers can find a successor worthy of him he succeeds, and of the private chaplaincy. Meanwhile, the Bishop, during Mr. Grove's temporary absence, feels like a rudderless ship floating on a desperate sea, both in his private and in his official capacity.

Ethel Heatherley, his step-daughter, is the only one in the house from whom he gets any comfort. She, out of her profound pity for the way in which her mother

makes a cipher of him, puts her own sorrow aside as much as she can, and tries to amuse him with her girlish unaffected talk about men and women, and things in general, and with that dearly-loved fiddle of hers, which once found no favour in Fanny Templeton's eyes.

But circumstances have materially altered and enlarged Fanny's mind about the fiddle. Now that the one who plays is going to be a marchioness, Miss Templeton sees much that is good and deserving of the sincerest admiration and closest imitation in all that "one" does. Miss Templeton sees that all is not well between Ethel and her mother, and shrewdly enough suspects the cause of the visible estrangement. Therefore, she feels that her avowed friendship for the daughter does not, by any means, involve a cessation of hostilities against the mother.

"There is no knowing what turn affairs may take even now," Fanny thinks. Lord Monkstown may get tired of wooing Ethel, who will not be won. A man's heart is often

caught in the rebound, Miss Templeton reminds herself, and even if such great good luck as is shadowed forth in this suggestive reminder should not be her portion, a lesser good may be secured. Ethel, as the Marchioness of Monkstown, will have it in her power to give much pleasure to any young lady friend who may be lucky enough to stay with her often. Why shall not Fanny be that young lady friend? "Most people like to have a bright, pretty, clever girl about the house," Miss Templeton tells herself, complacently, and she registers a resolve to be that girl in the Monkstown establishment.

Towards this end she flatters Ethel directly and indirectly, and round about and in unexpected and undefended places. She copies Ethel's style of dress and way of putting on her things, and glides into the same arrangement of the hair. She copies Ethel's modes of speech, her opinions, and *debonnair* way of doing things. She applauds the fiddle vehemently, and begs Ethel, in her magnitude and good nature, to take the trouble to give

her (Fanny) a few lessons on that once condemned, but now sweetest of all musical instruments. She takes to petting horses and dogs, and to love riding and driving herself, just as Ethel does. Until the latter, craving to get away from her own thoughts, finding neither peace nor pleasure in the society of her mother, and, believing in her truthful heart that when so much liking and regard is professed, much must be felt, falls into the habit of looking at Miss Templeton in the light that young lady has placed herself in! The light of strong, unselfish, devoted affection!

From the hour of Lord Monkstown's arrival, and establishment as a guest in the Palace, Ethel clings to this friendship as her best protection. The two daughters of the house are inseparable in these days, and Lord Monkstown, though he girds against never enjoying a *tête-à-tête* with Ethel, is partially reconciled to the order of things, which gives him the society of "so charming a woman as Miss Templeton!"

Yes! it has come to this, in the course of two or three days! The Marquis of Monkstown thinks Fanny a very charming woman; and almost wishes that her charms had cast Ethel's more piquant and younger beauty into the shade, at Boyne Place.

"A deuced sensible woman, too," his lordship tells himself; "one who listens to a good story well, and understands it thoroughly, and appreciates its point, by Jove!" This qualification is a great one in his eyes, for he prides himself on his powers in good storytelling, and it is obvious to him that Ethel, though she is pointedly polite up to the listening point, rarely takes in the gist of what he says so subtly.

Ethel, in fact, is sick to death of, and nearly worn out by, the part she is playing—a part that she knows she will throw up suddenly, one day, to the utter discomfiture of many, and the destruction of——!

Well! she will not, even to herself, word the conviction that she has that her mother is playing with combustibles, which will pre-

sently explode, shattering everybody who has been within reach of her lately—more especially those who have trusted, relied upon, and befriended her. But though she will not word it, she has it, and it disturbs and darkens her, and makes her a more easily-moulded and less fearlessly-reliant Ethel, than she has ever been before.

There is something pitiable in the way in which she so promptly complies with every little conventional request Lord Monkstown makes to her. She will play and sing to him by the hour (but the song he likes best, “Twickenham Ferry,” she carefully eschews). She is always ready to ride with him, and her mother has presented her with a handsome, weedy young thorough-bred, a perfect lady’s hack (which taxes the nerves and energies of the Bishop’s grooms), or to drive him along the lovely Allerton Towers lanes. But she is never ready to listen to him when he wants to play the lover. And the patience with which he accepts the situation begins to perplex her sorely.

If he would only grow indignant and demand an explanation! If he would only show righteous displeasure at the way in which the girl who had promised to marry him, treats him, Ethel feels that she could open her heart, and make her confession to him. But he will not do this, he will treat her as if he were perfectly satisfied, and had nothing to complain of; and, while he does this, Ethel feels tongue-tied on the most momentous subject of her life.

Long conferences take place frequently between Mrs. Templeton and Lord Monkstoun—conferences at which none of the others are allowed to assist. If vigilant Mrs. Templeton sees that her daughter's noble lover looks disappointed or depressed for a moment by Ethel's systematic evasion of aught approaching to lover-like demonstrations on his part, he is instantly swooped off by the vivacious lady, on some pretext or other. Now it is that he must come into the now finished, and nearly filled conservatory with her, to give his opinion on the blending

of certain colours, in the arrangement of various groups of plants. Now it is that he must go with her to the stables, to look at the new horses and ponies which fill the Bishop's stalls, and feed freely on the Bishop's corn. And when she gets him to herself in this way, she soothes the ruffled vanity, and pours balm into the wounded heart, with skill and efficacy.

"Ethel is still so much of a child that she hardly knows the meaning of love yet," she tells him; "but when once you have awakened it in her heart, you will find it no fleeting fancy with her. I know my daughter so well, that I can read her thoughts at a glance, and I know now that she shrinks from showing the real warmth of her regard for you, fearing you might attribute it to her desire to repay you for your generosity to me."

"My dear madam, it is distinctly understood between us that *that* subject is never to be alluded to," he says, magnificently.

"Ah! you are so good! But I can never

forget it ; but, about Ethel, believe me when I say that the seed your noble conduct has planted in her heart will bear rich fruit of love some day."

"I shall be perfectly happy and satisfied if I can feel that she marries me of her own free-will."

"You must never do yourself the injustice of doubting it ; she is a little in awe of you now ; I was just the same when first engaged to her dear father ; indeed, Mr. Heatherley told me, after our marriage, that he was many, many times on the point of breaking off our engagement, he thought my manner so repellant ; and I adoring him all the time—as Ethel does you."

Lord Monkstown is compelled to believe a lady who speaks with such a thrilling air of truth. But at the same time he does find it hard to reconcile Ethel's demeanour to him with that feeling of adoration which her mother declares the girl is fraught with for him ! However, doubt on the subject being intensely disagreeable, he dispels it as much

as possible, by turning his attention and thoughts in other directions—chiefly in Fanny's.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Templeton hurries on the *trousseau* regardless of expense, and continually commits Ethel to the course she has been forced upon, by compelling the girl to give orders and make choice of things for the approaching event, in the principal shops of Allerton Towers.

“It's all waste, sheer, wicked waste,” Ethel says to Mrs. Templeton one day when she had been goaded into selecting a forty-guinea seal-skin jacket. “I know these things will never be wanted; I know something will be good enough to happen to break off the marriage. I shall die, probably, for I can't live long with this dull, dreadful pain in my heart.”

“I know what has upset you this morning,” Mrs. Templeton says, encouragingly. “It is bad taste on Mr. Gifford's part to ride about with Miss Somerset; it shows a nasty, vindictive spirit.”

"Have you seen them riding together?" Ethel asks, quickly. "I haven't; are you sure you have seen them, mother?"

"Quite sure, dear; but if I had thought it possible they could have escaped your notice nothing would have induced me to mention the fact to you," Mrs. Templeton says, with her prettiest air of veracity, she, all the while, being fully conscious that the pair had passed unnoticed by Ethel, and deeming it a fair part of the curing process.

"Perhaps the earth will open and swallow us both up before Walter and I are wicked enough to marry, as other people have arranged we shall marry," Ethel says, and Mrs. Templeton, who is contented enough that Ethel should be unresigned, provided she be passive, thinks it wise to change the subject.

"We'll drive round to the cottage, Ethel, and see how they are getting on there," she says, assuming animatedly that Ethel is as much interested in the re-decoration

and furbishing up of the furniture at the cottage as she is herself. "She is putting her old house in order with a view to letting it," she tells the Bishop, but he knows, as well as she does, that she is putting it at its best in order to fill it with some of the grand guests, of whom she has made out an imposing list, who are to be invited to the wedding.

"I promised the Bishop that I would go and play to him half-an-hour before luncheon," Ethel says; "if you'll drop me I'll walk home."

Mrs. Templeton frowns lightly. For a moment her gay conscience pricks her as her daughter speaks, for the Bishop is laid up with a slight attack of the gout—and she has not relieved the tedium of the couch of pain by any of those readings which she so prettily shadowed forth to him that evening in the moon-lighted room at Weybridge.

"Tell him," she says, as the carriage stops, and Ethel prepares to get down, "that I know he will prefer such a substitute for me

this morning ; dear child ! you are very good, much better to him than his own daughter is ; when I have more time I shall delight in spending long hours with him in that grand old library——”

She checks herself, remembering that the Bishop is not here to be soothed by the fallacious hope, and that Ethel will not believe her.

While Mrs. Templeton and her daughter are out shopping this morning, Fanny is doing equally good work at home.

Lord Monkstown, who always feels more or less astray when sustaining Mrs. Templeton deserts him, for ever so brief a period, has been drifting about the house and grounds for about an hour, when Fanny, who has been keeping her eye on him, thinks that the time is ripe for her to try and divert his mind.

By the time she joins him outside on the south side of the house, where beds of Russian violets are making the winter air sweet as if it were summer-time, Lord

Monkstown has begun to feel himself neglected.

Now, that Lord Monkstown should be neglected, seems to be about the most distressing and untoward circumstance that can happen, in Lord Monkstown's estimation. Accordingly, when he is joined by Miss Templeton, there is upon him the air of an injured man.

"I am afraid," he says, stiffly, "that you are neglecting more important and more pleasant duties in giving me a few minutes of your time, Miss Templeton? Every one here seems to be in such a whirl of business that mere social amenities get disregarded."

"I have been watching you for the last hour, and longing to join you," Fanny says, with maiden guile. "I feared to intrude on your thoughts of—Ethel!"

The marquis is a trifle appeased, but far from being entirely satisfied; still, he thinks Miss Templeton a very charming woman—one who sees the best side of, and puts the best interpretation upon things! "A

very charming woman, indeed !” his lordship thinks ; and he rewards her as she deserves, by walking up and down within scent of the Russian violets for an hour.



CHAPTER VI.

I MUST HAVE TIME.

MRS. TEMPLETON has not garbled facts in saying she has seen Walter Gifford riding with Miss Somerset.

It has come about thus, that the pair are riding together :

Miss Somerset has been languid, and overcome with *ennui* for several days, and Mabel, like the good sister and staunch friend she is, suggests horse-exercise, and begs that Walter will order it.

"I'll order it; but who is to ride with her?" he says.

"I suppose she can get a groom from the same stable from which she gets a horse," Mabel says, with dignity. Then, her desire to see all things straight between these two gets the better of her dignity, and she adds—

"But surely, Walter, you will be able to

ride with Lily sometimes? and I know she will suit her time to yours."

"She had better understand that I am a poor and busy man; she had better feel from the first that I have no time for riding for pleasure!"

"Ah, Walter! *can* she forget that if she had had her way, you would have been a poor man no longer, however busy you might be?"

"We won't speak of that again, Mabel, please!" he says. "Lily did all that a kind, true woman friend could do for a man; it is my misfortune that I haven't been able to respond as a man would wish to respond to her noble kindness; but if riding will give her health, and my riding with her will give her pleasure, I'll ride with her, of course; only, don't you go building up a fabric of folly on the slight foundation of my concession."

"If you think I wish to interfere—"

"Oh, nonsense!" he interrupts, wearily; "it's beyond your power to interfere with

good effect, or ill effect, now; only, don't you, in a misguidedly good-natured moment, attempt to make Lily think that I am her slave--lover! I hardly know what to call the *thing* I was once. I am only *really* her friend, Mabel; I only really *like* her; let her understand this."

"You give me a pleasant part to play, and put things into my mouth that are pleasant to say," she says, in an offended tone; but her brother only laughs at her, and tells her that she hugs her chains, and finds Lily Somerset's yoke a light one, through love of her.

However, out of this conversation comes this result: that Lily Somerset hires a hack—the best that is to be hired in Allerton Towers, and Walter Gifford rides with her!

And Lily rides so warily! Warily as she does everything else; doing nothing to attract attention, but still winning it at every step her horse takes; winning it surely, but unwillingly enough from Walter Gifford, who

wishes she were less winning, or he himself less easily won; but still failing to find her faulty, and not seeing much cause to condemn himself.

She has a perfect seat, and as light a hand as ever touched the reins. As fortune will have it, too, the horse that has been selected for her is one that well displays the graces of her rider. A long, lithe, lean-headed mare, with a sweeping stride, and with action so swingingly easy, so faultlessly true to time, that her rider never swerves by a hair's-breadth in the saddle, whatever the pace may be.

Ethel Heatherley has taught Mr. Gifford to be a severe critic about horsemanship, but his critical eye and taste fail to discern aught with which he can find fault in Lily Somerset's style of going. Across country, where much fencing has to be done, Ethel would probably be in a better place than Lily, but as a straight-forward road-rider Miss Somerset is unexcelled in Mr. Gifford's experience.

This day he rides through the streets of Allerton Towers with her for the first time. Hitherto, he has managed to skirt the town, and get away into the more secluded lanes that intersect this lovely country. But to-day, Lily thwarts him naturally, and with apparent undesign, and he has to yield his consent to do what is repugnant to him, namely, ride through the principal street, in which are situated all the best shops.

He has a presentiment that he will meet Mrs. Templeton or Ethel, as soon as Lily says to him—

“Will you mind passing Turner’s shop this morning; they’re doing a dress for me, and I want to tell them that I’ve changed my mind about the puffed sleeves.”

Of course he can do nothing but assent to her proposal, for he has no valid reason to assign for refusing it. At the same time, he does heartily regret having expressed a dislike to puffed sleeves on the previous evening, since Miss Somerset is going to make her concession to his taste the

occasion of his more than possible discomfiture.

He is nearly passed the peril—that is to say, they have paused at Turner's, Lily has given her orders as to the alteration in the sleeves, and they are nearly at the end of the street, when Mrs. Templeton's open carriage passes them. Ethel, to Mr. Gifford's intense relief, is bending forward, pencil in hand, making an entry in a note-book, which is lying in her lap. But Mrs. Templeton's sparkling blue eyes are all over him and his companion in a moment, and there is a good deal of malicious satisfaction in the smile which accompanies the little bow she gives him.

“There goes the woman who has blighted my life!” he says, bitterly, and Lily, thinking he refers to Ethel, says—

“I am sorry you have seen her, and more sorry that she didn't see you; it's hard that all the pain of this chance meeting should fall on you.”

“She did see me; didn't you see how she

brightened up, and bowed to me, as if she had ascended the throne since I saw her last, but was still gracious and condescending enough to remember me; the day will come, I feel sure, when I shall know the full amount of my debt to Mrs. Templeton, and then I trust I may be able to discharge it."

"I thought you were speaking of the daughter at first," Lily says, gently. Then she goes on magnanimously to speak of her rival's beauty and brilliant grace, and to expatiate on the superb way in which Miss Heatherley will wear her rank.

"Bless her!" Walter says, when Lily pauses. "Whatever happens I shall always think Ethel the best and sweetest girl in the world. How such a mother ever came to have such a daughter is one of those unsolved problems of nature which almost paralyse the mind of man."

"Mrs. Templeton is a very fascinating woman, I should think," Lily says. She can bring herself to utter words of praise and admiration of Ethel, but that Walter should

glide on so fluently in the same strain is rather distasteful to her.

“Yes; I found her fascinating enough when she saw nothing better in view for her daughter than a marriage with me; but when she got in with the Palace and the St. Just set, and saw signs of weakness on the Bishop’s part, she assumed quite another aspect in my eyes; and now the woman is absolutely hateful to me, in spite of her being Ethel’s mother.”

“I am sorry she is a fair woman with blue eyes; you’ll identify her qualities with her colour, and unconsciously endow others who have the same complexion with them.”

“No, Lily, I shall never suspect you of either perfidy or wanton cruelty towards me,” he says, so heartily that the tears spring into Lily’s eyes, and the colour into her face.

“I may be cruel to myself, and perfidious to all the rest of the world, but I shall never be the one or the other to you, Walter,” she says, and he does love her a little for the

quiet unwavering way in which she persists in continuing fond of him, and continuing to show that fondness.

Well, it is the old, old story that is being told here. In most marriages there is more love on one side than the other, and in most cases the one who loves least is the happiest.

At any rate, however things are to be with these two people in the future, they are both very happy in the present (in spite of a few retrospective pangs which Walter Gifford feels), when they go into the old oak parlour after their ride, and Walter says:

“Well, Mabel, will you think Lily very rash when I tell you that she has consented to take me for better and worse? and that we’ve made up our minds, that as there is nothing to wait for we won’t wait for it, but will get the marriage over without delay.”

It need not be told that when she hears this, *one* of the trio at least is unfeignedly happy, with a happiness that is undisturbed by back-thought or forethought of any kind.

There is, as Walter says, nothing to wait for, additionally, there is no one to consult saving themselves. And so, before Allerton Towers recovers from the gasp of amazement with which it hears of the approaching marriage of its popular young surgeon, that marriage is an accomplished fact.

It comes off very quietly at the church of St. Bartholomew's-on-the-Wall, about a fortnight before those grander nuptials, in anticipation of which all Allerton Towers is thrillingly expectant, are to come off. There is no hitch of any kind, no let or hindrance in the proceedings, and Walter Gifford finds himself walking out of a secluded church with a wife on his arm, in the most ordinary and unexcited way.

"Ours must be a short wedding-tour, Lily," he has told her beforehand, and so now when he tells her that "ten days' leave of absence from his work is all he means to take," she is quite prepared, and perfectly acquiescent.

"If you will tell me to go straight to my

new home and begin our life together at once, as we suppose it will run on for some years, I am ready to do it," she says, cheerfully, and he is sorry for himself that he cannot emulate her tone as he replies :

"No, no ! the disposition of the first fortnight or so is your prerogative, after that you will be sensible enough to remember that I am a business man, and that business must be my first consideration."

"I will never forget that *I* am not the first consideration with you, Walter," she says, pathetically, but not at all crossly. And with secret pain he admits to himself that she is not, that she never can be the first consideration with him.

From the hour Mrs. Walter Gifford marries, she puts her former self in the background in a way that would touch her husband with tenderness—if he ever gave a thought to her. But this is a thing he rarely does. And when one of these rare periods of thoughtfulness for her do occur, she is

made so happy by observing them, that he can but think she finds her lot all that she can desire, and be well pleased with himself for his share in making it such a satisfactory one.

Mr. and Mrs. Walter Gifford go their social ways very quietly and unassumingly in Allerton Towers. They are known as people who are distinctly very well off, if not absolutely very wealthy; but they are also known as people "who are not likely to be in the Palace set," therefore the upper ten of Allerton Towers abstain from calling upon the bride, but do their best to make amends for this omission by talking about her a great deal.

Another current subject of supreme local interest is the extraordinary way in which Ethel Heatherley's marriage is put off. At first it had been understood to be definitely fixed for the first week in January. Then, Mrs. Templeton, her face masked by her sweetest smile, her feelings masked by her sweetest manner, has to announce that the

arrangements for the wedding cannot be completed in time, in consequence of the Christmas festivities ! Lord Monkstown listens to this statement with perfect politeness, even with a semblance of belief, but with a frigidity that is ominous, and that startles Mrs. Templeton into saying—

“I do assure you this is no excuse, the motive I assign for deferring the wedding for a short time is a valid and reasonable one, you must admit, my dear Lord Monkstown ? I have plenty of energy, but I feel that these Christmas doings will quite exhaust it—for a time.”

“I know that Mrs. Templeton will not let a trifle stand in the way of the fulfilment of my wishes—and her own !” he replies, bowing gravely, and she accepts this as a compliment, and is glad, under cover of it, to smile herself out of the room before he can say any more on the vexed and perplexing question.

She goes straight to Ethel, and begins in a tone of angry complaint that is

quite a new method in her treatment of her daughter.

“I have done my most odious task, Ethel, and put the wedding off as you insist; but what I have gone through in doing it language cannot tell. I am sure Lord Monkstown suspects that he is being played fast and loose with. I can only describe his manner as being contemptuously angry, and *I* have to bear the brunt of it!”

“Mother, dear, I wanted to bear the brunt of it myself. If you had only done what I begged you to do—let me go to Lord Monkstown, and tell him that while my heart aches so horribly at the thought of Walter Gifford having been wearied into marrying a girl he doesn’t love, I *can’t* marry—I’m sure he would have been generous and manly, and have set me free.”

“Ethel!” Mrs. Templeton says, sharply; “you’ll kill me if you break off this match; all my peace in life will go; you don’t know—you can’t imagine, how fierce and masterful the Bishop has been several times

already about money-matters; but if it comes about, through you, that I have none of my own, and that I'm dependent on him, he'll break my heart, and crush my spirit, and make me the most unhappy woman in existence; and this will be my daughter's doing! the work of my own child, for whom I have done all I have done. Heaven knows my own tastes are simple enough. A cottage and a modest competence would have supplied all my wants, and gratified all my desires; but I could not see you growing up without the comforts and luxuries to which your birth entitled you; and so, out of my unselfish love for you, I grew extravagant! and this is my reward, that you thwart me, and threaten to bring about my ruin!"

Her mother's words are very terrible to Ethel, though knowledge of what that mother is, combined with intuition, makes the girl more than half suspect that they greatly exaggerate the dangers and difficulties by which Mrs. Templeton declares herself to

be surrounded. Still, the words are very terrible for the daughter to listen to, and so, for the sake of soothing the anguish of mind which Mrs. Templeton forcibly portrays, Ethel promises afresh that, if time is given her, she will eventually fulfil the marriage-contract that has been made for her by her mother and Lord Monkstown.

“But I must have time!” the girl repeats, “Time to get accustomed to the thought of Walter’s having been so much weaker than I ever thought he could be; he’ll feel it so dreadfully himself some day, poor fellow!” she continues, with pathetic pity.

“You will soon get accustomed to the thought that a man for whom you once had a high —of whom, I may say, we both had the highest opinion—is weak; it’s what most men—indeed, I may say, all men—are,” Mrs. Templeton says, resignedly, and Ethel waxes impatient.

“There’s no need for you to take that tone, and pretend you once thought highly of Walter, and are disappointed in him now;

you know you're pleased at what he has done; you won't let yourself think that I'm cut to death nearly; don't treat me like a child with a broken toy!"

"My dear Ethel, you have used the words for which I was searching my limited vocabulary. That is just what Mr. Gifford has proved himself—a mere toy, in a clever, intriguing woman's hands; a mere broken reed for you ever to rely upon; but happier days are in store for us all, my darling! And when time has been allowed for your—I mean for our—Christmas festivities to be got over comfortably, you will reward Lord Monkstown for his noble patience, and set your poor mother's heart at rest? Yes, I know you will!"

"I will try to; it's all I'm good for now," Ethel says, and she begins her work of complete and entire self-abnegation this evening, by looking over, with apparent interest, some plans which the marquis's architect has forwarded for the re-building of the left wing of the Irish castle, which has fallen

into decay during the occupation of the present and late lords with their families.

“My grandmother—the most celebrated of all the Marchionesses of Monkstown—had her suite of apartments in the left wing, and held almost royal state there. Since her time the rooms have been practically unused; but they are the grandest in the castle, Ethel, and, as such, are well fitted to be specially dedicated to the service of the most beautiful mistress the castle has ever known.”

When Lord Monkstown says this to Ethel, Ethel bends her head low over the plans for the restoration of the left wing, which are lying on a low table before her. And Fanny comes up and kneels by her side, and whispers to her what a fortunate, highly-honoured girl she is in having her comforts and tastes studied by such a man of men as the marquis, and prays her to *seem* glad and grateful to him!” And lowly as she murmurs these words, they are quite audible to Lord Monkstown, who is on Ethel’s other side, and they make him think more favourably than ever

of Fanny Templeton, who is, his lordship decides, not only a most charming woman, but one gifted with a clear understanding, and a profound and highly-commendatory appreciation of him.

But there is something in Ethel's outspoken and simple reply to Fanny's whisper which makes him accord the highest place in his estimation to his future bride, after all.

"Lord Monkstown would do the same for any woman he was going to marry, Fanny. It's not so much me—Ethel!—as his future wife he's thinking of; and I'm sure you would not wish me to utter a lot of servile thanks, would you, Lord Monkstown?"

"No, Ethel," he says, heartily; "but Miss Templeton declaims the sentiment 'that if love prompted the thanks, there would be no servility in them.'"



CHAPTER VII.

THE MARQUIS OF MONKSTOWN ASSERTS HIMSELF.

MR. and Mrs. Walter Gifford have been home nearly three months, and still the Marquis of Monkstown displays the most exemplary patience, and still Ethel Heatherley pleads with her mother for "more time!"

The great conservatory has its sides nearly covered with creeping plants of rapid growth by this time, and is as perfect in every detail as if it were contemporary with the Palace, instead of only having been called into existence during the last few months, by Mrs. Templeton's magic wand.

This same magic wand has been very freely waved over the Palace and its grounds. The appointments of the former have been revised and improved by the exercise of Mrs. Templeton's taste, till the old *habitués* of the place hardly recognise it under its present

conditions of elegance and luxury. It has always been Mrs. Templeton's misfortune to lack the calculating mind; therefore, now, when the bills for all this elegance and luxury, which she has ordained for the greater glorification of her noble future son-in-law and daughter, come in, Mrs. Templeton finds, to her surprise and chagrin, that she is utterly unable to meet more than half of them. That she has, in fact, already exceeded her income, and, saving for any supplies she may wring out of the Bishop, will be practically penniless for many months to come.

Some of the tradespeople whom she has patronised with almost regal liberality knew nothing of, and, consequently, suffered nothing through her when she was Mrs. Heatherley. These are patient and forbearing, and really quite eager to have payment deferred till next year. But others who knew, and served, and suffered from the lady's custom in days of yore, are not disposed to show her any quarter now.

Over and over again they send in peremptory reminders that their bills have been “delivered.” These reminders she puts into the fire, whither the bills have preceded them. Having done this, she tries to forget all about them, little suspecting the maliciously-ingenious form which their next applications will take.

One morning, a whole budget of them are simultaneously delivered to the Bishop, each containing a notification to the effect that repeated applications having been made to Mrs. Templeton without satisfactory result, they now take the liberty of asking his lordship for an immediate settlement.

The sum-total horrifies his lordship, and the majority of the items scandalise him. For one article alone—a thing he has regarded as a mere piece of prettiness—a china plate, sunk in a velvet rim, and planted on a pedestal as a table—six hundred pounds is charged, and a clearly-worded description of it informs him that it is a “*Sèvres*” plate, painted expressly for, and once in the possession of,

Madame du Barri! In short, much of its value consists in its border being of the real *Rose du Barri*! That he should possess anything that rests its fame on original infamy is an abomination to him. How much more abominable when he is asked to pay six hundred pounds for it!

In addition to the bitterness of feeling involved in the enforced close consideration of these bills, and the direful extravagance they represent, there is the additional bitterness of knowing that he must discuss them with his wife, and that she will be unrighteously angry with him for doing so. He feels it within him that whatever justly hard words he may use, she will employ harder unjust ones. He knows now that under that fair, furrowless, smiling face is concealed a will of iron and a heart of stone, as far as he is concerned. He knows that it is his duty to counsel, and condemn her conduct. And he knows that she will defy him in her graceful, passive way, and deter him from doing his duty properly!

Again he dreads, above all things, that the facts of the case as it stands now, the fact of her having incurred these unjustifiable debts, should come to his daughter's ears. Fanny has been to a certain extent cowed into a state of quiescence lately, by her step-mother's solvency, and actual power of spending ready money. But her sense of social rectitude will be rampant when she discovers that Mrs. Templeton is impecunious.—and in debt.

In his dreadful doubt and despair the Bishop bethinks him of his step-daughter. If any one can help him out of this dilemma Ethel is the one. Moreover, Ethel, on the brink of a marriage with so wealthy a man as the Marquis of Monkstoun, will soon—as soon as she is over the brink, in fact—be in a position to help her mother honourably out of this deplorable difficulty! Accordingly, he sends for Ethel, and Ethel comes at once, violin in hand.

“My dear!” he says, deprecatingly. “No music this morning, I beseech you. I want

to speak to you very seriously, my dear girl, about your mother, and your marriage."

"About mother?" she asks, wonderingly.

"Yes, sit down and let me speak to you comfortably, Ethel," he says, nervously, for he does not like the task he has set himself. "I have been much pained and surprised this morning to hear—I mean to see—I may say to find—that your mother has been more extravagant than her—I should say than our—circumstances warrant; in fact she has run deeply into debt (with the most amiable intention of pleasing those around her, I am sure), and this morning the bills have been sent in to me with a peremptory demand for payment."

"Oh, mother! poor mother!" the girl says to herself; but aloud she only says—

"And you?"

"Cannot meet them, my dear," the Bishop says, with a sob in his voice; "cannot possibly meet them; and unless I do, Ethel, I shall be a dishonoured man here in my own cathedral town."

“That you shall not be through my—through us,” Ethel says. And then she tells herself that the time is now ripe for her to complete the sacrifice.

“I will come to you again by-and-bye,” she says, rising up; then with her face averted she adds: “Don’t tell Fanny; she doesn’t like mother, and may put a hard construction on what poor mother has done; don’t tell Fanny, will you?”

“With all my heart I trust that Fanny may never hear a whisper of it,” he says, fervently.

Then Ethel leaves him to seek her mother, but before she can find Mrs. Templeton, that lady has unadvisedly rushed in upon the Bishop’s seclusion and her own fate.

The bills—a long and formidable array of them—are stuck up in line against a row of books on the writing table. She gives them a cursory glance, gleaning nothing of their contents, and says, carelessly:—

“Am I inopportune? I wanted to consult you about the propriety of my taking notice

of that extremely elegant and lovely Mrs. Gifford. I find Lady St. Just has taken her up, and that being the case it won't do for me to stand aloof; but if you're studying these notes with a view of writing a Charge——”

“I am doing so, Mrs. Templeton,” he interrupts, terror hidden under his portentous demeanour. “I am doing so, Mrs. Templeton, but these notes concern you only, and my Charge will be addressed to you only.”

She nods her head slowly in reply to this exordium, and says, pacifically :—

“Do rest from your labours a little; I have always felt that you concentrate yourself too much on narrowing subjects; you are getting into the habit of thinking Allerton Towers the world, and yourself the most important person in it; it will be bad for your peace of mind in the long run if you do this; really it will.”

“I think, Mrs. Templeton, that you are doing your best to make me the person of least

—of most miserable and despicable account in Allerton Towers,” he says, with an air of bluster that does not frighten his wife for an instant.

“You little know what I could do when you charge *me* with lessening your status,” she says, throwing her head up in a way that makes him feel his position of being a step beneath her in some way or other, keenly. “What is all this about?” she continues. “Why am I greeted in this undignified manner? what has happened to make you forget yourself, and that I am a gentlewoman?”

For answer, he pushes the bills towards her, and when she has gathered them up and glanced at them, she flings them back in a heap before him.

“For pity’s sake, for the sake of yourself (since that I fear is the strongest appeal I can make to you), don’t try to give me the impression that you possess the narrow, pettifogging, uneasy, suspicious spirit your conduct expresses,” she says, coldly; “because a lot

of ignorant, half-insolvent, insolent local tradespeople have chosen to insult *you* by displaying unwarrantable distrust of me, you assume that I have been guilty of I know not what misdemeanour towards you. Understand, my lord, that in directing your wrath against me you waste what may be potent in other places; I ask you once for all to leave me to deal with my own tradespeople, and to defray my own bills; if you refuse to do this, I shall leave you to bear the brunt of the responsibilities you insist upon assuming."

"Your tone is dictatorial, and your course an altogether impracticable one, but if you will listen to reason we may still come to terms that will not involve discredit or dishonour on either side," he says, and she replies, coldly, that she "will not listen to reason even, unless it is couched in conciliatory language."

But she does not say this either crossly or coldly, and the Bishop cannot find it in his heart to be angry with so pretty and really

amiable a woman for long ; accordingly, he does couch his further remonstrances in conciliatory language, in language that is so conciliatory, indeed, that Mrs. Templeton rewards him by agreeing with him entirely, as to the enormity of charging six hundred pounds for a *Sèvres plaque*, made into a table by the aid of *buhl* and *marqueterie*.

“I’ll make him take it back,” she says, quite cordially. “I shall tell him that I doubt its being genuine in the first place, and in the second, that you don’t approve of its antecedents if it is ; that six hundred will be saved by doing this, and the rest of the bills can stand over, till I draw my half-yearly income in October.”

“Wouldn’t it be possible for you to anticipate a little ? I think it would be well to clear off these bills at once, my dear, and it can matter very little, whether you draw a cheque on your bankers now or next October.”

She looks at him keenly as he makes the suggestion, but his countenance does

not betray that he is fishing for the real source of her income.

"I dislike anticipating my income in that way, it really is too long beforehand; my bankers would think I had been terribly extravagant," she says, gently.

"And I exceedingly dislike owing money." The Bishop, making a fight for his principles in spite of her graceful graciousness. "Therefore," he continues, solemnly, "if you decline to draw your own money in advance, I must make an effort to raise the sum, and this I shall only be enabled to do by encroaching on my little capital."

"There is no need for you to do it: let them wait till October."

But this the Bishop refuses to do, and the poor woman really suffers keenly from remorse, as she reflects on her inability to discharge her debts, or to satisfy her husband on the point of why she does not do so. It is impossible for her to ask the Marquis of Monkstown to advance the money that he has promised as the price

for her influencing her daughter to accept him.

It is not only that she shrinks from the humiliation that is involved in the topic, but that she dreads his lordship becoming acquainted with the full extent of her extravagance. Altogether she is in a cleft stick, and her heart has rarely been heavier than it is now, as she leaves the Bishop's library, and makes her way to her own boudoir.

She is sitting by the table, her face buried in her hands, thinking over her jewellery, and trying to decide upon what she can best spare, that will make most money. A set of pearls would, if disposed of prudently, without an air of pressure, bring such a sum as would go a long way towards freeing her from her liabilities. But these pearls she has, in Lord Monkstown's hearing, promised to give Ethel on her wedding-day.

"I will not rob my child," she says to herself, "but I can't let the poor Bishop make a sacrifice for me; I have no right to expect

it; oh! if Ethel will only be sensible and conquer her weakness, and marry at once, I should have no scruples about letting Lord Monkstown know of my dilemma."

Even as she is thinking this, there comes a knock at the door, and she calls the smile back to her face, and banishes care just in time to give the very man of whom she had been thinking—Lord Monkstown himself—a bright greeting.

His first words make her nervous! Is she to have nothing but shocks this day?

"I have intruded on your privacy in order to speak to you on a very serious matter, dear lady," he says, so gravely that she feels her cheeks paling, and her lips quivering with agitation. Can Ethel have been so wrong, so rash, so cruel, as to have broken off her engagement?

"Your presence is always a most welcome one to me," she manages to say, and he bows graciously as he seats himself opposite to her.

"My motive in seeking you this morn-

ing is a very serious one, Mrs. Templeton ; it is to tell you that it is impossible for me any longer to blind myself to the very great repugnance your daughter has to the idea of a marriage with me."

"My lord!" is all she can gasp out. This blow is as heavy as it is unexpected. That Ethel should break off the engagement has been upon the cards all through, but that Lord Monkstown should back out of it is incredible!

"I have tried to think what you flatteringly told me it was—girlish timidity veiling real love—" he goes on ; "I have even tried to find satisfaction in the thought that it was stronger love for another man which caused her coldness to me ; but the truth has forced itself upon me bluntly and cruelly ; she actually dislikes me now, and if she is compelled to marry me she will come to hate me."

"You are wrong, indeed, indeed you are wrong," Mrs. Templeton says, brokenly, but with intense earnestness—"your sensitive-

ness deceives you; be patient with my child, and her heart will soon be entirely your own."

"I cannot deceive myself with that vain hope any longer," he says, seriously; "her heart will never soften towards me, and, if we were rash and wicked enough to force her inclinations, disgust and contempt would be the sole feelings I should create in her. I should be a most miserable man, and you a scarcely less miserable woman if we wrecked her life in the way that has been contemplated; my eyes are opened now, and I cannot close them again; it would be cowardly and unmanly of me, if—seeing as I do the real state of her feelings—I did not release Ethel."

"This is a very terrible blow to me, Lord Monkstown; but I cannot plead for a continuance of the engagement since you desire to break it."

"My desire points a very different determination; my sense of duty to your daughter compels me to take this step, deeply as it

pains me to do it; I shall ask you to be the medium of conveying my resolution to consult her happiness only, to Ethel; to tell her that I resign her, myself, would be too hard a trial for me, and the sight of my weakness might move her to compassion, which she would afterwards repent. I have only one further favour to ask, and that is that everything else shall remain on the same between us, as when I hoped your daughter would become my wife? This I ask of your friendship; this I entreat you to grant me."

"My lord, it is impossible," she says, in such serious earnest, that he feels she means it, and will remain firm in her refusal to be further indebted to him, "that agreement is cancelled by the unfortunate ending of what I at least believed to be a happy engagement."

"You grieve me deeply; let me implore—"

"No, no, my lord, it is useless, and you will only wound me by pressing me to continue to accept a favour from one who will now never

be nearer to me than a friend; I can only regret, that in my misplaced reliance on the certainty of my daughter becoming your wife, I have spent the money to which I now feel I had not the shadow of a claim; the past is beyond my control, but if I continued to be the recipient of your bounty now, I should be despicable in my own eyes."

He finds it more difficult to end this interview with dignity or grace than he had any conception of its being when he began it. It goes sorely against his sense of integrity, that he should cease to allow Mrs. Templeton the income agreed upon between them in former days, because of his now seeing fit to break off the contemplated alliance with Ethel.

Yet he cannot press the point further, for he sees plainly that though Mrs. Templeton had no compunctious scruples about selling her daughter, she has many strong ones about taking the money, now that she can no longer give what she is justified in considering a grand equivalent.

“That circumstances should have brought about such a termination as this, is, I beseech you to believe, very grievous to me,” Lord Monkstown says, with becoming emotion; and truthfully enough, Mrs. Templeton avers in reply, that it is very grievous to her also.

In very sooth the out-look is a gloomy and sad one for her now. Not only will she be compelled to allow the Bishop to pay these appalling bills, but she will have to confess her impecuniosity—worse than this, her absolute and complete pennilessness to him. And this, at a time when he will have to learn that her daughter will continue to be dependent on him.

Her position is a miserable one, but to do her justice, now that remorse is really awakened in her breast, her chief sorrow is that part of her punishment must fall on her husband who has confided in her, and the child who has striven to aid and save her.


“The poor Bishop! I shall bring him nothing but pain and grief,” she says to herself,

when Lord Monkstown leaves her, and she realises that all hope is indeed over for her, as far as he is concerned. Then she goes in search of Ethel to tell her that she is released!



CHAPTER VIII.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

UIETLY and unobtrusively, but still most efficaciously, has Mrs. Walter Gifford striven from the day of her marriage to make herself her husband's chief helper and counsellor, best friend and most zealous assistant. Feeling that she has won him against his will, she resolves from the first to make him and his comfort and happiness her one consideration. Feeling that she is the one who gives the most in every way, she determines that he shall find her as humble and submissive to him as she has been imperious and dictatorial to all the world hitherto.

“If he ever repents having married me,” she tells his sister, “the repentance shall be caused by something in himself—concerning

himself only! I will never give him a reason to regret that he has made me his wife."

In very truth he is obliged to admit that she is faultless as relates to him. Her first act is to make over her property to him unreservedly, in case they have no children; and for him to have the entire disposition of it during his life, in case they have a child or children, but for it to revert to the latter unconditionally at his decease. In either event he will be a wealthy man so long as he lives, and should there be no issue he will be free to bequeath his wealth to whom he will.

"It is rash of you to put so much in any man's power," her lawyer tells her, but she refuses to alter or modify the terms of her will, telling him that "she has put what she values infinitely more than she does her money—namely, herself—in Mr. Gifford's power already, and that she is confident that he will never abuse the unfettered exercise of that power, in any way."

Her full and perfect trust in him, shown

with such extraordinary generosity, touches him but little. It seems to him quite in right nature of things that a woman who loves him so well, and has been so anxious to marry him as Lily has shown herself, should in all things feel and exhibit illimitable reliance on him. Accordingly, though he thanks her for what she has done, he is not one bit the more loving or tender to her in consequence of it. And Lily knows that he thinks himself well within his rights in having such a great gift proffered to him.

But one other thing she proposes which does awake a little gratitude in his breast, and this is that his sister Mabel shall make her home with them.

“She has no one besides us in the world to love and lean upon. With us she will be always happy, for wayward as I often am, my waywardness never distresses Mabel,” Lily says to her husband, and he gladly accedes to her proposition, and tells her that she “is more than generous to make it.”

But Lily knows that what appears to him

generous affectionate solicitude for *his* sister, is in reality a vague but still strong yearning for the companionship of a friend who will always be devoted to her (Lily's) interests, who will always be patient, and sympathise with her, and, above all, who will always think whatever she does is right.

For the time may come, the young wife feels, when sympathy may be a very needful and precious thing to her. Not that she anticipates that Walter will ever be harsh or unkind to her, he is too just a man for her to entertain that fear. But he may lapse into a state of visible indifference, and her proud, affectionate heart knows that if he does this, it must turn for comfort to someone.

So Mabel comes to live with these, her dearest, and is supremely and unsuspectingly happy in the beautiful home, and in the society of the two whom she believes to be so attached and all-sufficient to each other. That Walter is grave to seriousness, and abstracted to the point of remissness very often, does not surprise her, far less pain her.

It is only to be expected from a busy, hard-working professional man. Mabel has never been romantic from her earliest youth, nor does she develop the quality now. Consequently, the prosaic way in which the bridegroom and bride deport themselves fails to excite any attention, far less any uneasiness on her part. Not being on the lookout for raptures, she is not conscious of their being missing. It is enough for her that the dear object of her desire is attained, and that Walter and Lily are man and wife.

Man and wife! United by the holiest bonds, linked together by a hundred ties of association, habit, and expediency! Yet far apart in reality, divided and kept asunder by a memory! And that memory is the undying one of Ethel in Walter Gifford's heart.

He cannot forget her! Do what he will in the way of reasoning with himself, and rebuking himself, he cannot forget the girl he has loved and lost, through no fault of either hers nor his he feels convinced. Honourable

and upright man as he is, moral man as he is, sensible man as he is in the main, these vain regrets for Ethel, those tender yearnings for Ethel, come between himself and his wife and present happiness at every turn.

He knows that in all things, saving in the one mistake of having married him, Lily is absolutely blameless. He knows that she has enriched him and his children after him, if he has any, with almost unprecedented liberality. Yet for all this knowledge he feels himself growing colder to her day by day, and sees, with something like a pang of self-reproach, that she feels it too.

And all the while their circle of friends in and around Allerton Towers—a circle that widens after the insidious manner of such things day by day—are saying of the Giffords that they are such an exceedingly happy and well-matched couple, that really he cannot be congratulated sufficiently on having escaped the toils set for him by that intriguing woman and her beautiful daughter.

Mrs. Walter Gifford is quite as popular socially as her husband is professionally. It is true she is not in what is technically termed, "the Palace set." But people laugh, and say they know the reason why she is not, and, as a rule, seem to think that reason does not redound to Mrs. Templeton's dignity and credit. But though excluded at present from the ecclesiastical potentate's festive gatherings, Mrs. Walter Gifford has no reason to complain of being slighted or unappreciated by the "best set."

Griffin-like, but really good-hearted Lady St. Just, gleaning an inkling of the true state of the domestic case, and being charmed with the grace and beauty of the wealthy young wife, who is unable either to buy or win her husband's love, calls on Mrs. Gifford, and generally makes much of her.

And as Mrs. Templeton, spite of her efforts at climbing to the top of the tree, is still on a much lower branch than Lady St. Just, society takes its tone from the latter lady, and soon it comes to pass, that if the Bishop's

wife visits well in Allerton Towers and the neighbourhood, she must do so with the certainty of meeting the woman who is most sought after, and that woman is Lily Gifford.

It is an additional bitter drop in Mrs. Templeton's bitter cup that she should be compelled to do this at this juncture. For it is already bruited abroad that the match between Lord Monkstown and Ethel is not to come off after all. And without telling direct untruths—which probably would be speedily contradicted—the Bishop's wife cannot put such a complexion on the affair as will spare her own ruffled vanity, and make it seem as if Ethel had been the one to draw out of it.

Indeed every drop in her cup is more or less bitter at this juncture,—the poor baffled, feebly ambitious woman! all her brightest hopes for her daughter have vanished, for another infatuated and rich marquis is not likely to stray Ethel's way. All the gloss is off her own story from the moment she has to go with her tale of utter impecuniosity, and

no prospect of matters improving, to her irritably irate husband.

There is certainly a want of Christian fortitude, as well as mere manly forbearance, in the way in which the Bishop bears the news, that in spite of all that she has averred to the contrary, he, and he only will have to bear the brunt of her reckless extravagance. He can preach rather touchingly on the subjects of the forgiveness of injuries, and the charity which beareth and hopeth, and pardoneth all things. But when it comes home to him, that it is well he should manifest these feelings towards his own wife, he finds the practice harder than the preaching, and grows more eloquent as he feels more intolerant to her and her late doings.

It is terribly hard on him that the two blows should fall on him simultaneously. He could better bear the contemplation and consequences of his wife's extravagancies and debts, if that wife's daughter made that noble alliance which has been one of the lures to draw him into this net. On the other hand

he could lose the vicarious glory of the noble alliance with becoming resignation, if at the same time he was not sadly sure that in order to stand a solvent and honoured man in Allerton Towers again, he must cripple himself, and impoverish his own daughter—together many a fair excuse may be made for his developing captiousness and querulous-repining in these trying days.

There has been a brief interview between Lord Monkstown and Ethel, before the departure of the former for Lamington Hall, where his lordship is going for a purpose that will be made clear by and by, an interview, during which Ethel proffers him such hearty, grateful, almost affectionate thanks “for his great goodness in releasing her,” that any latent vanity he may have had lurking in some secret place in his moral system, evaporates entirely for a time.

Whatever the consequences of the rupture of this marriage-contract may be to her mother, and with all her heart Ethel prays that it may be unpleasant only, not painful

nor hurtful, the girl feels that it is for the good of her own soul that she is saved from living a repulsive lie. As a friend—a friend who has been consistently kind and courteous, and now finally very generous to her—Ethel can give respect and real liking to Lord Monkstown; as a husband he would have been so odious to her that he might have been an occasion of falling to her.

How can she be grateful enough to him for her escape?

In her ecstasy of gratitude and relief, she says a great deal on the subject to Fanny, and is a little surprised at Miss Templeton's treating her confidences coldly, not to say, discouragingly. Immediately after the aforesaid interview, Ethel goes in search of Fanny, feeling almost sure that the latter will give her kindly sympathy, which, under the circumstances, she can hardly expect from her own mother.

But, a little to her surprise, Fanny listens to the communication with an air of chilling contempt.

“Isn’t it noble of Lord Monkstown?” Ethel asks, when she has told her story. “I always hoped and thought that something would happen to free me; but for him to do it himself, so kindly, too, I can’t thank him enough.”

“Perhaps you are assuming too much in supposing Lord Monkstown has done much violence to his own inclinations in breaking off the engagement,” Fanny says, coldly; “if I were you, I would not make myself ridiculous by affecting these raptures because a man has shown himself desirous of getting rid of you.”

“He isn’t that—at least, if he is, then there’s nothing generous or noble, or anything else that calls for gratitude and admiration in what he has done,” Ethel replies.

“Well, dear! I only say it *may* be so; men are faulty and fickle sometimes, as well as women; and Lord Monkstown is only a man, though we must all feel that there are unfortunately too few men like him. Naturally, he is one whom all sensible women must love

and admire ; in fact, you in your childishness (I've always told him it was nothing else) have gone on preferring a big piece of common glass to a true diamond. You were not born to be a great lady, Ethel, and I have no doubt you will be happier in a humbler sphere, one to which you have been more accustomed, than you would have been as Marchioness of Monkstown."

"Well, there's a chance for you now, to show how the Marchioness of Monkstown should conduct herself," Ethel says, laughing. At which Fanny draws herself up, and replies with a curious mixture of austerity and gratification, that such jokes are unbecoming, when made about a man like Lord Monkstown ; and that, though her father's position would entitle her to aspire to any position, Lord Monkstown is too much courted and sought after by innumerable ladies of the highest degree for her to have a foolish fancy.

Nevertheless, though she says this, there is an air of perfect understanding between Lord

Monkstown and herself, when that nobleman says to her presently, after the hour of his departure has been fixed—

“Can you take a turn in the grounds with me, or are those little feet afraid of the iron-bound ground?”

“Not if they tread the same path with you,” she answered, blushing brightly, and looking surprisingly young.

She puts on a becoming velvet and fur jacket, and a hat to match it, and goes out bravely into the frost and snow with him, her little feet capitally shod, and fully discovered by an extremely short dress.

“I suppose you have heard the result of my conversation with Mrs. Templeton and her daughter?”

Fanny nods assent.

“It was the only, the inevitable way to end it,” he says, grandly; “Ethel is a fine girl, and a beautiful girl, but she has been badly brought up; allowed to read too many foolish romances, I should say; at any rate, she has successfully nursed a sort of morbid fancy

with very little real root, into a straggling obtrusive plant, that twines about her life and impedes the action of those about her. She has taught herself to believe me a tyrant, and herself a sacrifice, I fear."

"She has been silly enough to do so, I know;" Fanny speaks as if the admission were dragged out of her sorely against her will; as if, in fact, to censure Ethel was really one of the most painful tasks she could be called upon to perform.

"I have told her," says Miss Templeton, "that the prospect of the fate that was before her ought to have made her the proudest and happiest woman in England; but poor Ethel! her soul couldn't rise to the heights. Ah! well! I shall be the chief sufferer by the change that has taken place. I *did* look forward, I *will* confess it, to seeing you sometimes, and to having my mind widened, and my heart strengthened by your wisdom and goodness. What should I have been to you, my lord," she continues, playfully, "if you had married Ethel? I should have been step-

sister-in-law only, but that would have been better than nothing."

"We shall always be friends, great friends," his lordships says, with emotion that would become a younger man. "I am going to Lamington now—my brother-in-law, Hawtrey's place—and I have great hopes shortly of seeing my niece, Caroline, and you acquainted with each other."

"You are very fond of your niece?" she asks.

"She is an admirable girl, and I hope to see her my daughter-in-law."

"I should think she would gladly marry Lord Kenmare, if only for the sake of *being* very, very often with you," Fanny says, with touchingly-innocent rapture. "I can imagine the pride she will feel in being so near to you, for I know what I felt when I thought I was going to be remotely related to you through my dear, *misguided* Ethel. Ah! well! It is good to have known the best, though it may be denied to us in the future."

Lord Monkstown feels himself to be that

“best” alluded to, on the spot, and recognises Fanny’s superiority more thoroughly than ever.

“Few women possess your remarkable insight into character; few are gifted with such discernment and discrimination, and to still fewer is granted the graceful gift of expressing appreciation as you do,” Lord Monkstown says, with lofty approbation. “I can assure you that what you have just said makes me more desirous than ever to make my niece and you known to each other. It will be an inestimable benefit to Caroline to have such a friend in the family, in the event of her marrying Kenmare.”

Miss Templeton hears the slip, and marks it, too, which his lordship makes in thus identifying her with his “family.” But she is far too acute to drag it forward prematurely into position. It may remain with safety in the background, and still be a valuable aid.

“And now I must take my leave,” Lord Monkstown goes on, looking at his watch.

“Is this really ‘good-bye?’” the lady asks, with a tremulousness in her tones that touches him into replying, “Not good-bye; you must be far harsher to me than you have ever been, before I can bring myself to take a final leave of you.”



CHAPTER IX.

ETHEL'S RIVALS!

FROM the day of Lord Monkstown's departure all things seem to wear a dismal aspect at the Palace. Few faces within its precincts wear a smile on any occasion. Mrs. Templeton ceases with startling suddenness to be young and sunshiny, and gives way to depression in a way that is only equalled in selfishness by her former conduct in the days of her seeming prosperity. Ethel, though she is in reality more at rest than she has been for months, finds it impossible to feel or feign cheerfulness in the face of her mother's fretful discontent and unhappiness. The Bishop is as distinctly glum and ill-humoured as the friends of dissent could desire to see a churchman who is placed in so high a position. And Fanny oscillates

between hope and despair relative to the dearest and closest secret of her heart.

Meanwhile, during this temporary lull at the Palace, a storm of feeling is raging in the town relative to the Bishop's wife's debts, and the jilting of the Bishop's wife's daughter. Mrs. Templeton is too much unnerved by the downfall of her house of cards to attempt to stem public opinion, and put "the case" before society's eyes properly and prettily for Ethel. And Ethel, so long as she knows herself to be free, is quite unconcerned as to the way in which "they say" her freedom has been obtained.

But a terribly disturbing conflict rages in Walter Gifford's breast when he hears that it has all come to nothing between Lord Monkstoun and Ethel Heatherley. The severance of the chain that bound her to Lord Monkstoun does not bring him nearer to her in reality; and he owns that it would be an awful thing if it did do so, since he has a wife. But in a corner of his imagination—an ill-regulated and badly-managed corner—

Ethel *seems* to be more his than she was the other day! And he blesses her for giving him this fanciful comfort.

By this time their social position is clearly ascertained and accepted, and their social engagements have multiplied greatly. Lily graces the position well, and fulfils all engagements that tend to the aggrandisement of her husband with a patient sustained vigour that is astounding, when it is taken into consideration how grusomely most of them bore her. But in this, as in most other things, she puts herself and her own inclinations in the background altogether.

Lady St. Just, having met Mrs. Walter Gifford, and been enchanted with her afresh at the house of a mutual acquaintance, feels powerfully impelled to do that social doughty deed which is known as "making up a party for a bride." At this party she resolves that Ethel Heatherley shall be present, in order to cure the girl of any latent, lingering, romantic feeling concerning Mr. Gifford.

"When Ethel sees that man with that

radiant wife of his, the child will know that her day is done, and his dead buried; that conviction forced upon her by the evidence of her senses, she will bury her own, and be happy at last with Kenmare."

Accordingly, Lady St. Just invites the Bishop and his wife to dinner, and asks the Bishop's daughter and Ethel to come in the evening.

Fanny, before whom blooms a possibility which, if it comes to pass, will put her a step higher on the social ladder than that on which Lady St. Just stands, cavils at this indignity of not being invited to the dinner with her father, and refuses to go at all.

"I have no taste for a scratch evening 'at home' in the country," she tells Ethel; "in town it is different. There, if you do brush shoulders with people from the debatable land, they're sure to be celebrated for something either creditable or the reverse."

"You mean they're either famous or in-

famous, these people you don't mind brushing shoulders with—in London?" Ethel asks.

"No; I don't quite mean anything so broad—not to say loosely elastic," Fanny laughs; "but I do mean to say that in the country some people (like Lady St. Just, for instance) don't mind editing a social miscellany that they would abstain from mixing with if they weren't dull. Now I prefer waiting to be festive until I can be so in good style, among good people."

"We were outsiders, I suppose, till mother and the Bishop married, weren't we?" Ethel asks, quietly; but there is a lurking laugh in her eyes that makes Miss Templeton lower the haughty flag she has hoisted rather prematurely.

"It is such a provoking thing when people twist generalities into personalities," Fanny replies, complainingly: then she adds, "and I don't see why you should pretend to think that we ever held our heads up higher than your mother and you did; I believe you want to make a breach in our friendship,

Ethel. I believe you think that I had something to do with Lord Monkstown breaking his engagement with you."

"I'm sure I never thought anything of the kind; and even if I had thought so, I should have been grateful to you for helping to get me out of that," Ethel says, vehemently, for she is quite unconscious of the fact of Fanny having some reasons, not wholly unconnected with Lord Monkstown, for terminating the excessive intimacy with Ethel.

"Of course you deny it; it would be a little too unjust to blame me, even if Lord Monkstown does feel a strong friendship and real regard for me," Fanny goes on, in an injured tone. "I did all I could to put the most flattering face on your manner towards him, for I pitied you, Ethel, and knew how eager you must naturally be to exchange your sad position in this house for the proud and independent one Lord Monkstown offered you."

"But I wasn't a bit anxious to do that," Ethel says, wonderingly. "And the Bishop

is too kind to me for me to feel my position a sad one here."

"My dear Ethel, we are *not* in the Palace of Truth; don't try to impress me with your extreme veracity, because, to be honest, I'm not easily impressed; at any rate, I can't emulate your affected contentedness, for ever since Mrs. Templeton came here I confess I have felt my position to be a *very* sad one. Lord Monkstown's kind heart was pained for me several times."

Ethel's cheeks burn. Her mother is not faultless, the daughter is fain to admit this much to herself; but she is not a petty tyrant in a systematic way, nor have her sins of extravagance affected Miss Templeton in any way as yet.

"Don't impute blame to mother before me," she says, quietly; and then she goes on with affectionate energy to add, "and try to remember what a flattered, pampered woman she has always been, before you judge her harshly about anything. I have heard that my father idolised her, and that during the

whole of their married life he never raised a single objection to anything she did, or proposed doing."

"Spoilt her for decent every-day life, in fact," Miss Templeton rejoins; and then, feeling that she has paved the way rather prettily to a disclosure that will be made in a few days, Fanny goes her way through Allerton Towers for the last time as an unimportant person!—for the last time as merely the Bishop's daughter!

It is the day of the dinner and "at home" at Lady St. Just's, and the Bishop and Mrs. Templeton, arrayed in the garbs and the smiles that society demands, are making their distinguished way, preceded by three or four magnificent beings in amazing suits of blue velvet and plush, towards the drawing-room. As she flits along a pace ahead of him, the Bishop is struck afresh by the almost youthful grace and symmetry of the slender figure of his wife, and he marks with satisfaction that this grace and symmetry is well set off and displayed by costly and beautiful dress,

and by the set of rare pearls, about which he has felt nervous lately, fearing they have been sacrificed to present needs in the general wreck; for the pearls belong to Ethel by right of promise, as he well knows, and that Ethel should be defrauded of anything through her mother's folly would give the Bishop a pang of real sorrow. This sight of the pearls is reassuring, therefore, and being inspired by it he speaks to, and looks at his wife more kindly than he has done of late.

The dinner party is small, still, the very biggest of the big county magnates are at it, and Mrs. Templeton can no longer doubt that Walter Gifford has made his mark, and won his place, when Lady St. Just, pointing out lovely Lily as she speaks, says:

“This party is made up for the bride; you know the Giffords, of course?”

“I know, or rather knew him; his wife I have never met,” Mrs. Templeton says, sweetly, as if the not having met Mrs. Walter Gifford was a subject of mournful regret to her.

A slight shuffling of the human pack of cards, and Mrs. Templeton finds herself sitting on a sofa by Mrs. Walter Gifford's side, while the man who was once to have been her (Mrs. Templeton's) son-in-law stands up strong and prosperous before her!

Strong and prosperous, in a room full of people of admitted high position, all of whom are more or less desirous of knowing more of his wife! While Ethel, her own beautiful child, is unmarried still! has "just been jilted," people are coarse and cruel enough to say. And she herself has been proclaimed a penniless woman in the city in which she once held her head so high, and avowed that gold and position were the only things she wanted and would will for Ethel.

But she is a brave woman still, in spite of the way in which her nerves have been torn to tatters lately. And now, when she knows that many eyes are bent upon her, eager to detect the slightest sign of wincing under the humiliation there must be for her in this

meeting with Mr. Gifford, she conquers all outward show of feeling, and says :

“It is always so pleasant to meet familiar faces in fresh scenes, especially when, as in your case, Mr. Gifford, the familiar face looks happier and brighter than ever.”

His wife, sitting by Mrs. Templeton's side, feels there is sarcasm of a not too kindly order in that lady's face. For Walter's face is rarely bright or happy now, and to-night its expression borders on solemnity of an even more intense kind than the well-bred Briton usually displays in society.

“I find very little pleasure in meeting with familiar faces that have once beamed false kindness upon me,” he says, and at the moment Lady St. Just, seeing that these two are conversing pleasantly, as she imagines, makes a rapid alteration of the pre-arranged plan of her table, and ordains that Mr. Gifford shall take the Bishop's wife in to dinner.

This change involves sending a message to the butler to alter and transpose the names

of certain guests, and, feeling confused, that functionary manages to place Mrs. Templeton and Walter Gifford close up by Lady St. Just, who sails into action side by side with a garrulous old gentleman, who has lately been the guest of "that good fellow, Hawtrey, at that palatial place of his, Lamington Hall."

Mrs. Templeton pricks up her ears when she hears these words. Pricks them up, not with pleasurable anticipation, as she would have done the other day, when Ethel was to have been the wife of "that good fellow, Hawtrey's," mighty brother-in-law, but with the undefinable dread of hearing something unpleasant presently, which is the portion of each one of us at some period or other of our respective careers. Involuntarily she ceases to babble on lightly and easily, as she has been babbling for the last ten minutes to Walter Gifford, and listens anxiously, forebodingly, for what is surely coming.

"Monkstown came while I was there," the sprightly old newsmonger—one of the

most inveterate club-gossips of the day—goes on airily. “Monkstown, you know. Aye! to be sure, you rent his place. Boyne Gate. Well, he came, looking altogether unlike the typical Irish landlord of the period; our right-reverend friend” (he inclines his head in the direction in which the Bishop looks out from between two rotund dames of high degree, and some tall table decorations) “our right-reverend friend is one of the luckiest, as well as, of course, one of the most deserving sons of the church; his daughter will have a splendid position, by Jove!”

“It was his *step*-daughter, and it’s all off,” Lady St. Just says, below her breath, making a vain effort at the same time to subdue her informant into silence with a glance. But the well-informed country-house visitor is “kittle cattle” to deal with. He will have his say, while his say is a novelty.

“No, no, I assure you I have it on the best authority. Hawtrey himself, who had it from Monkstown *himself*; it’s Miss Temple-

ton, our right-reverend friend's own daughter, who is to——"

"Mrs. Templeton, I hope we are to see both Fanny and Ethel by-and-bye," Lady St. Just interrupts, as politely as it is possible to interrupt anyone, bending forward kindly and sympathetically, under the influence of the pitying sense she has of Mrs. Templeton wanting all that can be given her of protection and sympathy now.

Mrs. Templeton shakes her head; she cannot control her lips and command them to speak for a moment, and the skilled *raconteur* seizes the opportunity her silence gives him to say in an audible aside to Lady St. Just:

"Mrs. Templeton? the mother of the fair bride-elect."

"The step-mother of the bride-elect, if there's an elected bride in the case," Lady St. Just says, coldly; "but I know you of old, Mr. Grey; if you can't bring the rumour of a divorce, you will bring one of a marriage."

“Ha, ha, ha!” the cheery old gossip laughs, delightedly; “feeling that the latter leads inevitably to the former, I suppose you mean.” Then he steadies the muscles of his society-benumbed face, and becomes as affectedly solemn as he has before been jocular and juvenile.

“You are right, quite right! these are very serious subjects, and anything like joking about them is in extremely bad taste. Monkstown is on his last legs, I fear we must all admit that; still, he can make the young lady a marchioness, and that being the case she will overlook the shakiness of the legs in consideration of the solidity of the position. Pretty woman, too, I hear,” he goes on, forgetting Mrs. Templeton’s vicinity, “and clever enough to have got the whip hand of Monkstown, even while he was engaged to another girl.”

These words, uttered with the air of one who knows all about it, render Mrs. Templeton’s position of masterly inactivity untenable any longer; she cannot sit there listening

and not responding, now that the "other girl" has been mentioned.

"The Marquis of Monkstown commands every feeling of respect and gratitude I have," she says, softly, bending forward as she speaks. "I am more than glad to hear that he contemplates making a marriage, which I trust and firmly believe will ensure his happiness."

As Mrs. Templeton says this, Lady St. Just buttons the sixth button of her glove, and indicates, by a facial contortion, that the moment has come when the gentler sex are to be severed from the ruder for a while. From every point of view Lady St. Just sees that silence on Mrs. Templeton's part, on the subject of the Marquis of Monkstown, would be golden now. But Mrs. Templeton judges differently. Fanny's flag shall not be hoisted so high above Ethel's, without a valiant effort on the part of the latter's mother to raise Ethel's standard, too.

"My own fatherless dear girl disappointed him bitterly, bitterly, I know, and deeply do

I regret that she did so; but my charming step-daughter, having caught his heart in the rebound, relieves me of all anxiety concerning his future happiness."

The old gentleman, who has blurted out the good tidings so prematurely, is so overcome at the angelic way in which Mrs. Templeton takes the intelligence that another girl has stepped into the enviable shoes which were once placed ready for her daughter's wear, that he can only ejaculate: "Monkstown must be mad, by Jove!" and as Mrs. Templeton glides away, smiling seraphically, he conceives and henceforth nourishes a feeling of almost vindictive hate against Lord Monkstown; regarding that nobleman as the destroyer and oppressor of the widow and orphan, and always speaking of Fanny as "an artful jade, who repaid her sweet little step-mother's loving confidence with the basest ingratitude."

Indeed, he at once proceeds to air these sentiments, for he is an impulsive as well as a gossiping old gentleman, and naturally, as

Mr. Gifford is nearer to him than any one else at the table, it is into Walter's ears that the strain of mingled pity and condemnation is poured.

"Monkstown's a gay fellow, always has been a gay fellow," he begins, confidentially, quite disregarding the way in which Mr. Gifford visibly shrinks from the subject; "but I thought better things of him than this. To throw over a lovely young thing who adored him, positively adored him, is being really a little too lively at Monkstown's time of life; you agree with me, I'm sure?"

"I really can't estimate the amount of damage done to Mrs. Templeton's ambition, but I believe the young lady was more grateful for the breach than she would have been for the observance of the promise," Mr. Gifford says. But the old gentleman won't admit of this view of the case being taken for a moment.

"A man may be forgiven for backing out of a thing of the sort if he's a contemptible

commoner ; but a man who can make a girl a marchioness is bound to behave honourably and keep his word, by Jove ! I pity the sweet girl and her amiable and excellent mother with all my heart, and when I see Monkstown next I shall give him the cold shoulder, by Jove ! ”

Meanwhile, Ethel's amiable and excellent mother is uttering a few well-chosen words, that sink, as she intends they shall do, into the minds of her hearers.

“ Surprised at the information ? Yes, naturally, rather surprised, but not nearly so much so as I should have been if I had not made a study of Fanny's character ; it is in the nature of some people to work in the dark, as it is their delight to spring painful surprises upon those who trust them most, and deal most openly with them. I may feel a little hurt at learning from a stranger that my husband's daughter has been systematically undermining my own dear, frank Ethel ; but I am not surprised. ”

She shakes her head, and tries a tearful

smile as she says this, and the whole room goes with her in heart, condemning Fanny as a sly, intriguing, callous, unprincipled schemer. But Fanny will hold a very different place in their estimation next year, when the slyness, intriguing callosity, and unprincipledness brings about the great result, and makes her Marchioness of Monkstown.

Mrs. Walter Gifford says a word or two that sound pleasantly in poor Mrs. Templeton's ears this night.

“A better, brighter lot must be in store for your beautiful daughter than to be an old man's darling; Lord Monkstown. since he can console himself, as they say he is doing, would have satisfied neither her heart nor her head.”

The evening guests begin to assemble now, and among them is Ethel. looking more brilliant than ever, Walter Gifford thinks, in the confusion that covers her for a moment like a rosy veil, as she is greeted by and greets his wife—her rival! Presently she hears the

on dit which has been brought from Lamington Hall, and it does Mr. Gifford's unruly heart good to see the unfeigned smile of amusement which rapidly chases away the brief look of amazement with which she listens to it.

"Poor Fanny! fancy having to bottle up all the joy she must be feeling, for fear of seeming to triumph over me," she laughs out. "She has such a profound admiration and regard for Lord Monkstown, that I'm sure she'll be very happy."

This she says to the Bishop, who has mounted his paternal stilts, and is trying to suppress his intense satisfaction, and to portray dignified disapprobation at having been unconsulted by his child on this momentous matter. No one shall say that the Bishop of Allerton Towers is unduly elated at this unexpected bit of worldly aggrandisement. He calls up a sour expression, which he usually keeps for wear when ritual in all its defiant decency and order is observed in his presence. But Ethel won't suffer this look to reign long to-night.

“*Do* be glad!—as you ought to be; it’s all clear happiness, as far as I can see, and mother and you mustn’t mar it by regretting that some trifling routine business hasn’t been observed.”

“Your counsels shall prevail with me at least,” the Bishop says, infinitely relieved at being coerced into playing the easy part he feels.



CHAPTER X.

SO HAPPY?

THE longest and dullest evening I ever spent in my life," Mrs. Templeton says, throwing herself back angrily and wearily, as the carriage containing the Bishop, Ethel, and herself, rolls away from Lady St. Just's door. "As for you, poor child, you must be worn out, harassed to death! To meet with such perfidy is a more distressing thing than the actual wrong that is wrought by the perfidy."

"I can't feel that there is anything for you to be annoyed about," Ethel says, in a low tone, hoping that the Bishop will not hear what they are talking about, since the tone in which Mrs. Templeton is evidently prepared to discuss it is not pleasant.

“And I really cannot admit that my daughter has been perfidious,” the Bishop says, in a stately manner. His daughter has just attained to a loftier position in his estimation than she has ever held before. Is it not his duty as man, father, and Bishop, to defend the means by which she has won this position?

“Fanny is of age,” he goes on, before Mrs. Templeton’s wrath will allow her to speak. “and I am rather inclined to respect the modest dignity which has made her reticent on the point of Lord Monkstown’s suit, until she—until he, I would say—”

“Until strangers gossip about it as an accomplished fact, before you, her father, who is in the densest ignorance as to what has been taking place.” Mrs. Templeton cuts in volubly. “Fanny is of age! Yes, we all know she has been that for the last dozen years. But, being of age ought not to do away with filial feeling, or cancel the obligation to confide in and respect a father.”

Mrs. Templeton is rather clever at placing other people's obligations and duties in conspicuous array. To hear her on the subject of another's misdemeanours is always edifying. But on the present occasion the Bishop will not permit her to be accuser, jury, and judge, all in one.

"I have but little doubt that Fanny will offer a perfectly satisfactory explanation of the reserve she has observed to *me*, and that is all I can desire of her."

"I am quite aware that you don't desire her to show any kind of deference or even courtesy to *me*," Mrs. Templeton murmurs. And then, as Ethel can think of nothing soothing to say at the moment to either of them, there is silence in the carriage till it draws up at the Palace door.

There is nine o'clock post in Allerton Towers, and by it have come three letters from Lamington Hall. Two of these are addressed to Miss Templeton, and one to Henry, Lord Bishop of Allerton Towers, and the latter—as well as one of those directed to

herself—Fanny sees, with a throb of elation, is from the Marquis of Monkstown.

His lordship's letter to her contains as clear and distinct an offer of marriage as a man can make, and it further prepares her for the contents of the other letter, by telling her that his niece, Miss Hawtrey, will write by the same post, inviting her (Fanny) to spend a fortnight at Lamington Hall, in order that "the family" may be properly introduced to her who will shortly (he hopes) be the wife of the head of the house!

Verily, Fanny is having her reward for all the weary years of waiting for a marriageable man to come her way. She is well supplied now with armour and weapons to defy and resist any attack upon her that Mrs. Templeton may be preparing to make.

She takes the Marquis's letter to her father, and lays it on the library table, and then goes back and seats herself by the drawing-room fire, and waits with proud composure the arrival of the Bishop and his wife.

Her soft cheeks flush and her eyes dance with pleasure, as she thinks of this good thing which she has gained for herself, this end which she has attained in spite of all adverse wishes.

“I couldn’t have imagined a better fate, far less have desired a better one,” she tells herself, contentedly. “I like him quite well enough for comfort, and it will not hurt my feelings for half a minute if he likes anyone else better than he does me by-and-bye; and he will give me what I *adore!* the money by itself would have made me happy, but the title with it gives me the perfection of happiness.” Then for a minute or two her mind reverts to Mr. Grove—“poor Bernard!” she calls him—and she wonders what he will feel when he hears of her exaltation, and tries to fancy that his was a deeply-rooted, though thickly-veiled attachment, and that she behaved rather cruelly to him on the whole.

She has plenty of time to conceive and rehearse her part before the party comes home

this night, and she does it so well that Mrs. Templeton feels that her step-daughter is a marchioness in mind already, the moment she looks round as they enter the room. Assuredly the certainty of filling a lofty position does do more for a woman's deportment than all the drill and dancing masters in the world.

"Papa," Fanny says, rising up and approaching the Bishop, with a display of daughterly deference that leaves Mrs. Templeton no room for censure. "Papa, the post to-night has brought me the most interesting and important letters I have ever received in my life. I hope you will be as glad as I am when I tell you that the Marquis of Monkstown has asked me to be his wife, and his niece, Miss Hawtrey, has invited me to Lamington."

"I am glad, Fanny, very heartily glad," Ethel says, going forward, and kissing Fanny with a genuineness of pleased affectionate feeling that touches even Miss Templeton.

"And in every respect I am glad, and

gratified, and thankful," the Bishop says, with emotion, as the future marchioness bends her head with dignified dutifulness before him; "pride on the subject is a feeling I shall not permit myself to entertain, it would be highly unbecoming in one of my cloth, but if anything could justify or excuse my feeling it, it would be the fact of my only child forming an alliance with one so noble, honourable, and distinguished, as the Marquis of Monkstown."

"Don't roll his title in your mouth in that way," Mrs. Templeton says, languidly; "one would imagine to hear you that he was the only nobleman you had ever heard of; and it's not complimentary to Fanny to let your satisfaction be so visibly tinged with amazement."

"I would thank you for your consideration. Mrs. Templeton, if your words didn't contain a half-hidden rebuke to papa, and an open sneer at me," Fanny says, quietly. Then she goes on discussing her future with the Bishop as if Mrs. Templeton didn't exist.

"Every kind of mortification and an-

noyance has been heaped on me to-night, Ethel," Mrs. Templeton says, fretfully, when they are upstairs in Ethel's room, and about to part for the night; "all my plans have failed, all my hopes are blighted, all my fondest calculations for you are upset. Walter Gifford has made a capital position; his wife is not only admitted into but courted in the best society, and Fanny Templeton wins the high stakes which *you* have lost; poor, out-witted, successfully rivalled by a girl I despised when I married her father, and with no prospect of getting you off my hands, what is to become of me?"

"I'm sure the Bishop will never grudge me a home, and I'll try to make that home a happy home for you, mother dear." Ethel says, soothingly and brightly, ignoring all things not absolutely kind in Mrs. Templeton's speech.

Walter Gifford has a surprise as well as the Bishop this night, but Walter's is of a painful and alarming nature. His wife has been very

silent and very pale. he has remarked, at intervals during the evening, and this silence and pallor he has wrongly attributed to "unworthy jealousy" of Ethel. Accordingly, he has not commented on it, but has rather wrapped himself up in a cloak of indifference.

But when they reach their own house, and Mabel comes as usual to the door to receive them, letting out as she opens it a flood of light from the comfortable, encouraging-looking hall, Walter sees that Lily can hardly walk, and that there is a bluish tinge round her mouth, and a pathetic look in her face that he has never seen before.

"Are you not feeling well, dearest?" he asks, in real alarm, and for a moment her heart beats so quickly, in response to the coveted words of tenderness, that the warm blood surges up into her face, giving it the appearance of health again.

"Better now, dear," she says, buoyantly; "but I can't tell why I have been shivering and half faint all the evening; the rooms

were warm, I heard the others say, but my hands and feet are like this" (she puts a hand of ice into Walter's as she speaks). "and there's a mist before my eyes."

She begins her sentence blithely enough, but her last words come out laggingly. They are in the hall now, which is flooded with light from both the lamp and the bonnie blazing wood fire which burns on the hearth, and Walter sees the colour recede from her face, leaving that ominous pallor, and more ominous blue tinge more marked than before.

The hall is furnished as a hall should be. It is full of comfort, and encouragement and promise. A couple of large fat sofas stand, one conveniently near to the big bay window for summer use, the other by the side of the hearth. A long low oak table stands hard by the fireside sofa. In the bay window a brown flower-stand holds as many pots of cyclamen, camellias, tulips, lilies of the valley, Russian violets, ferns, and spring's fairest harbinger, snowdrops, as can be

wedged tightly in together. Back in a shadier place, a similar stand is verdant with many varieties of fern. Over the high mantel-piece there is a trophy in harmoniously coloured Oriental ware. A dark blue drugget covers the floor, and over this are thrown two or three Persian rugs, and two or three tiger-skins. All round the walls instead of pegs for the display of the family's worst hats, coats, and waterproofs (which really are *not* interesting objects of study to visitor's, though, as a rule, they are the only things offered to the visitors' view on their way towards the habitable part of a house), are polished antlers, and embossed brass salvers, and dishes. Everything is bright, agreeable to look at, and suggestive of the rest of the house, so that Lily pausing in it for a minute or two, as she hangs over the rounded end of the sofa and gazes apparently into the ruddy depths of the leaping fire, is not an extraordinary thing.

But it is extraordinary that she should

be still in the same attitude of abstraction when Walter looks up at her again, after he has glanced over the contents of two or three letters which were awaiting him.

And why does Mabel look at him in quick alarm, and run to Lily's side, crying out something—"what" she hardly knows—and he does not hear at all? And when he follows Mabel with a spring, why does he clasp Lily's form so vehemently to his heart, crying out as he does so, "My God, forgive me!"

Yes! it is Lily's "form" only which is left for him to clasp now, for Lily's soul has been called home, and Lily's heart (which loved him so) has ceased to beat.

It savours of the morbid (according to the mind, at least, of the compiler of these chronicles) to go into the details which surround such an event. In real life they must be gone into, however heart-tearing they are; but in fiction they may be passed over, not carelessly, but reverently.

The sudden death of a woman so young,

apparently happy and healthy, and so beautiful and popular as Mrs. Walter Gifford, naturally causes intense sympathetic excitement in and around Allerton Towers. There is not a human being who knows him who does not deeply pity the bereft husband, who is so crushed down by grief that for many days poor Mabel is compelled to cease, from her wailing for her idolised sister-in-law, in order that she may aid in fanning Walter's feeble spark of life back into a flame.

It is not grief only which threatens to destroy Walter Gifford. It is agony and remorse!

He cannot bring himself to take a medical view of a common case of heart disease, now that the case is that of his dead wife. He cannot make her dead, from purely physical causes, in his own heart, though his reason and knowledge tells him that nothing—skill, kindness, the most passionate love, and the most perfect contentment—could have prolonged Lily's life. He

can only feel agony, as he reflects on the briefness of it all, and remorse as he recalls every touch of indifference that he has manifested towards her by word or deed. Thank heaven for this, that he has only indifference, not unkindness, to repent him of. But, ah! how keenly he feels now how sharply his indifference must have cut.

He can't help remembering all the time Mabel babbles on about "their perfect happiness and mutual love," how little *real* happiness either of them knew in their wedded life, and how unequally divided was the love. He can't help remembering how thoroughly Lily satisfied every taste of his, however fastidious that taste might be, and how little she appealed to his heart, though hers was all his own. There is something ghastly to him in this dispensation which has removed her from his side in life, remembering all these things as he does, and feeling as he does about them! And all the while the world he lives in

sympathises with him to the best of its ability, as with one who is utterly bereft, and for whom all light is gone out.

Perhaps the one who sympathises with him most deeply, is the one who has the best understanding of his case. Ethel Heatherley really mourns for what *she* knows he must be suffering. "If he had only learnt to love her dearly before she died, it would have been better for him and for her," the girl tells herself, when the drear tale is told in the Palace, of that scene in the surgeon's hall. As it is, Ethel knows that a worm that will never die, will always be gnawing at the foundation of the perfect fabric of happiness, which may, by-and-bye, be built up for Walter and herself.

For Ethel does not ignore probabilities, and she recognises that it is in the order of what is fittest and best, that Walter and she shall be man and wife in the days to come, when this great bitterness is overpast.

In the interim, things go on with other

people very much as they have gone before, and will go on again. The popular young surgeon—Mr. Walter Gifford—finds himself abruptly more popular than ever, and both interesting young widowhood, and aging maidenhood in Allerton Towers, call him in about minor maladies with a frequency that is as beneficial to his purse as it is injurious to his temper.

But Ethel Heatherley never makes a sign that she knows her old lover is in sore distress. Mrs. Templeton sends him a letter of tenderest condolence (in which Ethel has sternly forbidden her name to be used), and with her letter comes a magnificently made wreath of magnificent hot-house flowers. But there is not a word, not a bud from Ethel!

Still, when week after week, day by day, the young widower finds his young wife's grave covered with wreaths and bouquets of lilies of the valley, he feels that Ethel Heatherley has not forgotten him in his time of tribulation.

Nor has she done so, for with every lily she lays on Lily's grave, she leaves a prayer for the living husband as well as for the dead wife!

Fanny has gone to Lamington to be made much of by the family, as it is seemly the future Marchioness of Monkstown should be. She goes with all her war-paint on, lovely new dresses, pearls (which her step-mother has found it convenient to let her have for a "consideration," and which Fanny refers to as "heirlooms," from this time forth), and the most delicate complexion that Nature ever allowed to be supplemented by art.

Altogether she feels the success she is, when she stands forth in her seal and otter skins, and purple velvet, and hears herself hailed in the softly-lighted terra-cotta drawing-room at Lamington Hall, as the Marquis of Monkstown's bride-elect.

The Marquis, and his brother-in-law, Sir John Hawtrey, are both well disposed to do her fitting homage. But Miss Hawtrey stands

a little aloof, and says presently to her cousin—

“Ken, I don’t like her; uncle will be wax in her hands, and she’ll mould him into very disagreeable forms.”

“And you’ll be out of the way of seeing them for one,” Kenmare laughs. “Grove is here too often for her not to see that. I shall often winter ‘with my cousins, in South Africa;’ and as for me, while I live I’m the eldest son, you see, and if I die!—well, bless her son if she has one, and make him more like his father than his mother.”

“I wish it had been Ethel Heatherley who had come to this distinction,” Caroline says, pursing her lips up with propriety at the mention of the children now unborn. But Kenmare has still enough of the original Marcus Boyne about him not to respond to this wish.

It is altogether beautiful in its smoothness and absence of fussiness the way in which Miss Templeton arrives and is received at Lamington Hall. It is a fact that the bride-elect would

have permitted a little more demonstration in her own honour, but this being lacking, nothing else is wanting.

“I am glad to be here in time to bid you welcome,” Miss Hawtrey says, jumping out of her [own unostentatious little pony-trap, as the big landau containing Miss Templeton comes up with many a prance and scuffle to the door.

And the future marchioness descends graciously, and tries to forget that she has been expecting a mounted tenantry to meet her, and a band to play her in.

She is so much disappointed at the informal manner of her reception that she cannot refrain from saying—

“I should be inclined to think I had come the wrong day, if the carriage had not been sent to meet me.”

“Oh! dear, nó! the train is rather late, that is all. Uncle Monkstown told me to expect you half-an-hour ago.”

“I hope that your uncle has not been more impatient for my arrival than you, my

hostess, have ; if he has, I, as your guest, shall feel quite hurt."

She says this with such a visible air of condescension, as if she felt herself to be really very good indeed, thus to consider and put herself upon terms of equality with a mere Miss Hawtrey, who is not going to be a marchioness, that Caroline is half embarrassed and half amused.

"My dear Miss Templeton, my uncle's friends command a welcome here at all times ; how much more then the lady who is to be his wife. But he wished your reception to be quiet and informal, as the announcement of the engagement has not been made public yet."

"I am adverse to demonstrations and parade of any kind," Fanny says, "but I know what is due to him!—and due to me!"

She does know what is due to her, and in the course of the next few days she has that due paid with a vengeance. There is about Miss Templeton no feeble temporising senti-

ment. What she will, that she will! And, somehow or other, it is done!

The Marquis of Monkstown has never been put through his paces properly before now. But now he trots and caprioles just exactly as the fair directress of his future indicates that he shall trot and capriole. He is made to bestow himself—or rather to bestow his money more abundantly, than he has ever done. “What you must do,” are words that soon come to have an unholy ring in his ears. For Fanny has learnt her pretty pleasant lesson well, and it is nice for her to have to reckon up all the heavy hostages she owes to fortune. Nice, very nice, to feel that she is in duty bound to patronise every form of gaiety which may obtain for the next twelvemonths in that Connaught district, in which her husband’s estates are situated. Nice, very nice, to feel that she will be ably supported whatever her made expenditure. Above all, nice to feel that whatever she does is above cavil or complaint from the home party.

Her term of trial at Lamington Hall is made very easy to her. When once Caroline Hawtrey accepts as a fact this misadventure, that she should have come at all, the rest is easy.

For Fanny is suavity itself, and Miss Hawtrey knows how to knock under to the inevitable.

Lord Monkstown, dignified as he is, strikes the casual observer rather humorously now and again. He is so direfully afraid that the mere spectator may make the mistake of thinking his blooming bride marries him for what he has got—not for what he is!

It is on his honour now that this woman, whom he is winning without giving himself the trouble of wooing her, shall be very fond of him and show her fondness. It is also on his honour that he shall deserve that she does this. He is too big and grand a man, in every way, to desire to get all and give nothing. Accordingly, he “hops about,” as Fanny calls it, and is too ready and alert altogether for his position.

“She’s the most detestable woman I ever saw in my life,” Caroline Hawtrey says to her father and Lord Kenmare, when they three are discussing the bride-elect on the night after her arrival at Lamington Hall. “She hasn’t done a single wrong or silly thing since she came into the house, and for all that she’s detestable.”

“She has very clear skin,” Sir John says, meditatively; and Lord Kenmare adds—

“And she’ll take care the governor doesn’t go off romantically loafing after any inferior cattle that may low at him; but she’s an awful young woman in her rectitude, and I hope he will be happy with her.”

Kenmare says this to his uncle, Sir John Hawtrey, and Sir John shakes his head solemnly, in response, but at the same time he is thinking what “a deuced lucky fellow Monkstown is to get such a fine woman!”

“An old English baronetcy is worth that Irish marquissate,” he tells himself, thoughtfully; and when Fanny does herself justice, in her manner of taking leave of every-

body for the night, Sir John half determines to run a tilt with his brother-in-law about her.

But after-reflection decides him that she is one of those good things which are better left alone! And once having come to this conclusion, he gives the reins to his “pity” for Lord Monkstown!



CHAPTER XI.

“SINCE LAST WE MET, I——”

HANNY has been several days at Lamington Hall, and oddly enough, from some freak of chance, she has never heard Mr. Grove's name mentioned, nor does she know that he is a frequent and a favourite guest.

It is, therefore, a great surprise to her one day, on coming in with Lord Monkstown from a morning stroll in the grounds, to find Mr. Grove at the luncheon table, with a thoroughly at-home look about him, as if he had often occupied that seat next to Miss Hawtrey before.

Miss Templeton's breath rarely fails her from astonishment, but on this occasion it does. It is with almost a pant that she replies to his hearty greeting.

“My call is on you, to-day,” he says,

presently ; and then he adds, "I have been hoping to come and offer you my heartiest congratulations every day since I heard of your arrival, but now, as the time draws near, I find I have such a multiplicity of things to do."

"As the time draws near for what?" she asks. "Are you still dreaming of that South African archdeaconry—or whatever it is? You had far better be contented to work on with papa till a living falls vacant, than go away into solitude and poverty."

Mr. Grove looks at Miss Hawtrey with a flash of fun in his eyes as he replies:

"I don't think I have any fear about either the solitude or the poverty ; my only qualm is that the place is one charged with responsibilities, and that I may fail in filling it well."

"You won't fail, Bernard," Miss Hawtrey says, quietly, and at this mention of his christian name, Fanny nearly tumbles off her chair.

"Are you *very* intimate with Mr. Grove?" she says to Caroline Hawtrey, as they saunter

through one of the conservatories after luncheon, waiting for the carriage which is presently to convey the quartette—Miss Hawtrey and Fanny, Lord Monkstown and Bernard Grove—to a neighbouring town on a shopping expedition.

“Yes, very,” Caroline says, laconically.

“I am glad to hear it,” Miss Templeton says, mounting her favourite hobby, pomposity, with celerity; “papa and I both think him a most *deserving* young man; the position of Bishop’s chaplain, of course, is one that might have inflated him, that would have inflated many men; but he has such a well-balanced mind. I really am quite sorry to hear of his going to South Africa.”

“His mind will keep its balance there as well as here, I hope.”

“If he only had patience, I am sure papa or Lord Monkstown would do something for him,” Fanny goes on, patronisingly; “out there he will be out of the way of preferment, and I fear very much he will end his days in poverty and obscurity.”

“At any rate you will be glad to hear that he won’t pass them in utter solitude. I shall be with him.”

“You!”

Fanny’s surprise is so great, that she plucks a flower spasmodically, and pulls over a pot in doing it.

“Yes! why, does the news excite you so?” Caroline says, calmly.

“I never knew—I have never heard of his being a friend of yours till to-day, and now, to hear that you are going to marry him and go into savagery with him, is startling.”

“It’s only been settled to-day that I am to do so,” Miss Hawtrey says; “and as for its being savagery, you’re mistaken about that. There will be quite enough civilisation for me, and of a healthier kind than I shall leave behind me.”

“If I had known that you were going to marry him, I wouldn’t have offered him patronage in the way I did,” Fanny says awkwardly.

"Why not?"

"Well, you see, I spoke on the assumption that he was poor; but, of course, if he marries you he will be rich, and might naturally think my manner of offering him papa's help impertinent."

"If it were impertinent, his being a pauper or a man of wealth could make no difference, the impertinence was there."

Luckily the carriage comes to the door at this juncture, and the two ladies sheathe swords, and look for their respective escorts.

"Bernard," Miss Hawtrey says to her lover, as they are having a secluded chat over "five-o'clock" in Caroline's own boudoir, "that Miss Templeton is a most demoralising woman; she has actually made me feel curious, a thing I never was guilty of being in my life before; did you ever make love to her?"

"Yes, to a certain extent."

"Did you ever wish to marry her?"

"I would certainly have married her once upon a time."

“And wasn’t she in love with you in return?”

“No.”

“How was that?”

“Because she has always been desperately in love with another person.”

“And that person is——?”

“Herself.”

“I thought so,” Miss Hawtrey says, with an air of satisfaction; “my curiosity is quite appeased; I have no more questions to ask about her.”

About the same time, Fanny, sipping her tea in the drawing-room, says to Lord Monkstown:

“I can’t tell you how surprised I was to meet Mr. Grove here in the first instance, and to hear of his being engaged to your niece in the second; being your niece she ought to make a much better match.”

“Oh! I don’t know; Grove’s an excellent fellow, and Caroline has money enough of her own.”

“But!—think of his position!”

“My dear girl, his position is that of a gentleman, and may be identical with that held by your father by-and-bye.”

“It’s not the match I can feel satisfied at *our* niece making,” Fanny says, boldly.

“One would imagine you had a pique against Grove,” Lord Monkstown says, jocularly; “is it so, Fanny? Did he ever cast sheep’s eyes at his Bishop’s daughter?”

“He was presumptuous enough to do so,” Fanny says, treading down conscience ruthlessly.

“And you rebuffed him?”

“Need you ask? Should I be likely to encourage unwarrantable pretensions; now I’m going up to my room; I shall wear my emeralds to-night; all my other jewellery gets neglected now for the sake of *your* gift.”

She clasps her hands over his shoulder and stands on tip-toe to kiss his cheek, and then retreats with a shy lingering movement that is not lost upon him.

“How the girl loves me,” he tells himself,

“and how prettily she shows it. Poor Grove! it is rather hard on him to meet her here under these circumstances. Caroline is completely cast into the shade by my Fanny; but there’s partial consolation for him in the money. Poor Grove, gentlemanly fellow too; but Fanny’s a remarkably superior woman, and no common place character would suit her.”

Fanny wears the emeralds this night as she has promised; wears them with a deep pink silk. The emeralds are so large, and are distributed over so much of her person, that she resembles a rose-bush where flowers are in the majority and leaves are few. The emeralds are Lord Monkstown’s gift, and are set in the form of shamrocks. They fortunately afford subject matter of conversation, and set Lord Monkstown off on a favourite national theme.

“The chosen leaf of bard and chief,
Old Erin’s native shamrock.”

he quotes, and then Mr. Grove reminds Fanny that she used once upon a time to

sing that song, and asks her will she sing it now?

On Lord Monkstown backing up this request she half consents, but as Lord Monkstown opens the piano, she says—

“Caroline, will you accompany me? I can’t accompany myself.”

“Let me do it as of old,” Mr. Grove says at once, and Fanny feels Lord Monkstown’s eyes level themselves at her with a malicious glance.

She sings false, stops and begins again, only to break down a second time. Seeing him at the piano in the old way that had been a daily habit at the Palace; looking down on his handsome head, and contrasting his well-favoured youth with Lord Monkstown’s maturity, is too much for even her cold nature to stand unmoved. As they all look at her in amazed enquiry, the tears gush out of her eyes, and hopeless of concealing her agitation, she turns and rushes out of the room.

“Oh, oh! my lady! the wind sets in that

quarter, does it?" Lord Monkstown thinks, and it flashes into his mind for the first time that his Fanny's heart is less in the matter of her marriage than her ambition.

"Miss Templeton is not emotional as a rule?" Caroline says, looking enquiringly at Mr. Grove.

"No, she's not," he says, frankly; "but that song happens to be one she used to sing very often to her father; she's a very devoted daughter, you, know," he goes on amiably in explanation to Lord Monkstown, "and since the Bishop married again, things haven't been so happy as they were before."

Good Mr. Grove, real knight of honour and honesty that he is, he will not suffer a passing breath to dim the brightness of a woman's pride for a moment if he can help it.

"So," the old Marquis thinks, "the love was more on her side than on his, that's evident; not that I care which way it was, only Grove is a splendid fellow, and Caroline has won a prize."

"Would you like the two weddings to take

place the same day at the same church?" Lord Monkstown asks Fanny the next morning, watching her narrowly.

"What two weddings?" she asks, nervously, "ours and Caroline's? She will be married here, surely, at Lamington; papa would feel it deeply if I were married anywhere but in his own cathedral," she says, with trembling lips. Entirely satisfied as she is with her own lot, the thought of Bernard Grove standing at the altar with another woman is not pleasant to her.

One day in spring, just as the hedges about Allerton Towers begin to be gay with primroses and violets, Ethel Heatherley goes out into one of the lanes on a wild flower gathering expedition. A year ago she had walked along this very lane with Walter Gifford on the day of their engagement, a happy-hearted, proud young betrothed.

"Only a year ago!"—she stands still, struck almost as if with a blow by the thought. Only a year ago, and so many

things have happened in these twelve months: first the rupture with Walter, then her mother's marriage, her own engagement to Lord Monkstown and its breach.

"All these things within the compass of one year," she says aloud. "What will the next bring me, I wonder?"

As if in answer to this question she sees Walter Gifford riding down the lane.

A few moments more and he jumps from his horse and is pressing her hand heartily.

"Since last we met I——" his voice fails him, and the ready tears run down Ethel's cheeks. How he longs to kiss them away.

"Oh! Walter, don't try to speak of it yet to me; I shall only cry and upset you."

He makes an effort and controls himself. After a minute's silence, he says:—

"I knew we should meet some day soon. Let me carry your basket as I did in this very place last year."

She renders the basket up to him gladly.

"That means that you are going to stay here with me a little time."

“As long as you’ll let me, Ethel.”

“No patients claiming you this afternoon?”

“None ! I’m quite a free man.”

There is a significance in the words that brings the colour to her face, but she bends down over the primroses and recovers herself.

“Is Mrs. Templeton quite well?”

“Yes, mother’s well, but not very happy, I’m afraid; our not being so well off as we were weighs on her mind, I’m afraid. Just now she’s extra low-spirited because Fanny is going to be married, and poor mother can’t get over her annoyance at my not becoming the Marchioness of Monkstown. Still, she takes an interest in the preparations, she *is* so good-natured, you know; she is making designs for the decoration of all the reception rooms; even Fanny allows that things wouldn’t be half as nice as they will be if it were not for mother’s taste—the little ante-room to the drawing-room is to be done entirely with primroses and blue violets—masses of them—all round the wall.”

“Would Mrs. Templeton see me one day, soon, if I called at the Palace?”

“*I* would.”

“I must see your mother, too, Ethel dear,” he whispers, and so without another word being said these two feel that they have given themselves to each other again.

END OF VOL. II.



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